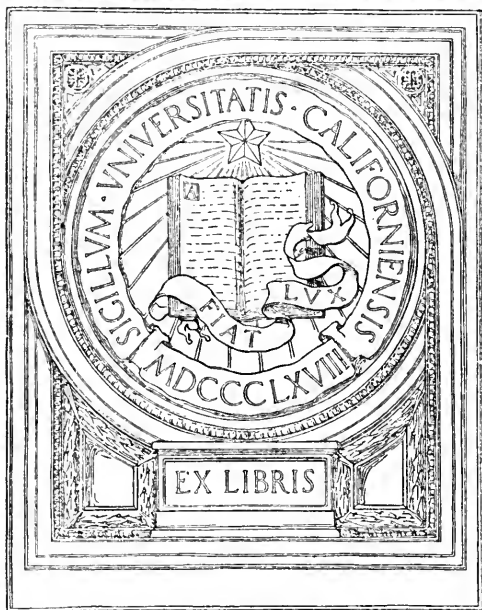


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CHRISTIANITY

INTERESTED IN

THE DISMISSAL OF MINISTERS.

A

VINDICATION OF THE PEOPLE

FROM THE CHARGE OF

BLASPHEMY,

AND A

DEFENCE OF THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.

IN SIX LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO

W. WILBERFORCE, ESQ. M. P.,

AND THE

RELIGIOUS PUBLIC.

By CHRISTOPHILUS.

“Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks: methinks I see in her an eagle muing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full mid-day beam; purging and unskaling her long abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance; while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate a year of sects and schisms.”

MILTON'S *Speech for the Liberty of the Press.*

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THIS
Humble Vindication
OF THE
PEOPLE AND THE PRESS,
IS INSCRIBED TO THE
LORDS AND "COMMONS"
OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM,
BY
ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

"Lords and Commons of England, consider what a Nation it is whereof ye are the Governors : a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to. But now, as our obdurate clergy have with violence demeaned the matter, we are become, hitherto, the latest and backwardest scholars of whom God offered to have made us the teachers.

"Behold now this vast City ; a city of refuge, the mansion house of Liberty, encompassed and surrounded

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with his protection ; the shop of war has there not more anvils and hammers working, to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed justice in defence of beleagured truth, then there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present as with their homage the approaching reformation : others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement. What could a man require more from a nation so pliant and so prone to seek after knowledge? What wants there to such a towardly and pregnant soil, but wise and faithful labourers, to make a knowing People, a Nation of Prophets, of Sages, and of Worthies ?”

MILTON. *Speech for the Liberty of the Press.*

PREFACE.

THESE Letters have been hastily drawn up, at the earnest request of some zealous friends of Christianity. I have regarded more the matter than the style; and being exclusively occupied in a laborious profession, possessing only the leisure moments of the wearisome hour of midnight, I claim forbearance from the critical reader. Having been till within the last twelvemonth intimately connected with the political Press, and possessing considerable knowledge of the amazing mass of religious and polemical publication increasingly diffused throughout the whole empire; having also much opportunity, from personal connexion, for learning the habits and opinions of the manufacturing classes of society, I have esteemed it an imperative duty to vindicate the Press, and to rescue my fellow-countrymen from the bold and sweeping imputation of infidelity. It has been my wish, as far as possible, to confine myself, in the

following Letters, to this one object, and to avoid other questions of political and controversial prejudice. I have abstained, wherever I could, from any direct allusion to party and doctrinal differences of opinion, and am not aware that I have levelled at either even an unintentional *insinuation*; yet if the cap may sometimes fit, I have no desire to deprive the occupant of the honour of wearing it. My argument is, that a Ministry exhibiting such an ignorance of the real character of the People, must be utterly incompetent to hold the reins of government. The speech from the Throne (January 23, 1821,) leaves them completely in the lurch: and though the eulogy on the loyalty of the People is rather ambiguous, it is still sufficient for conviction. *Out of thine own mouths will I convict thee.*: “I well know that, notwithstanding the agitation produced by temporary circumstances, and amidst the distress which still presses upon a large portion of my subjects, the firmest reliance may be placed on the affectionate and loyal attachment to my person and government, of which I have recently received so many testimonials from all parts of my kingdom;

and which, while it is most grateful to the strongest feelings of my heart, I shall ever consider as the best and surest safeguard of my throne."

Though a student of the laws of England, I am also a Protestant Christian ; and in that character I sometimes presume to read my Bible, and to meditate on the laws of Christ. There I discover the philosophy and foundation of all law—there I discover the extreme variance of the acts of the Ministry with the precepts of revelation—and there I have sometimes detected the most glaring contradictions between British and Gospel-legislation. *Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken to you more than to God, judge ye?* Acts, iv. 19.

Our Lord foresaw these days of pretended zeal for religion. *Not every one that cries unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name ? and in thy name have done many wonderful works ? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you ; depart from me, you that work iniquity.*

I have retorted on our calumniators, and exposed somewhat of *their* irreligion. I have told them, in the language of St. Paul to the hypocritical Pharisees, *you that make your boast of the law, by breaking the law, dishonour God; for the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.* If the hearts of the People are estranged from them, the cause is made evident. "The general story of mankind will evince that settled authority is very seldom resisted. Gross corruptions, or evident imbecility, is necessary to the suppression of that reverence with which the majority of mankind look upon their governors, or those whom they see surrounded with splendour and fortified by power."—*Rambler*, No. 50.

If I am asked, how I, who have not the license of "holy orders," can presume to discuss religious matters, I answer, JESUS CHRIST and his apostles were laymen; and the argument of these pages, in the hands of a layman, is perhaps more likely to meet attention, when it is known that the writer has no worldly interest in advocating the cause of Christianity.

My only fear is, lest, upon this exposure of the ill accordance of the creed and prac-

tice of *professors* of the gospel, the unbeliever may find an objection against the truth of revelation: he may think that Christians cannot be persuaded of its Divine origin, and yet show such sovereign contempt for it in their daily violations of its injunctions. It is, however, no reflection on the soil, that weeds spring up, and beggar the garden of Christianity: let the disgrace lie upon the cultivators. It can be no objection to the doctrine of Christ, that many of those who profess it are not saints. It would not be less absurd, says Bonnet, to object against philosophy, that all those who profess it are not philosophers: does it follow from such a fact that philosophy is not well calculated to make true philosophers? Those who make the greatest external profession of a doctrine, are not always really and effectually convinced of its truth, or most inclined to make it the rule of their lives. Statesmen often regard religion as an “*arcanum imperii*” among the pegs and wires of state machinery. STRABO tells us in plain terms—“That it is impossible to lead women and the common herd of the people to true religion, to piety, and virtue, by philosophical argu-

ment and reasoning ; but that recourse must be had to superstitions.”—xix. SYNESIUS, an ancient bishop, is of the same opinion, where he says, “ Ac uti ophthalmicis caligo magis expedit, eodem modo mendacium vulgo pròdesse arbitror, contrà nocere veritatem iis, qui in rerum perspicuitatem, intendere mentis aciem nequeunt : ” “ As darkness and shade are more comfortable to weak eyes, so I think false relations do more good to the common people. On the other hand, truth is often hurtful to such who cannot lift the eye of their understanding to brighter and more sublime objects.” *Christianity*, however, disowns these spiritual hypocrites ; and I would fain hope their numbers are very few. But their impious coalition with revelation cannot be used as an argument against its truth ; if it were, the ruin of every cause would be easy : the concealed spy has only to insinuate himself in the ranks of his opponent, to fight a sham battle, and to suffer a preconcerted defeat. The same observations apply to the well-intentioned but ill-directed efforts of misbelievers, who, in their zealous support of *Christianity*, have opened such breaches for the entrance of its opponents. “ Every

man is not a proper champion for truth, nor fit to take up the gauntlet in the cause of verity. Many, from the ignorance of these maxims, and an inconsiderate zeal unto truth, have too rashly charged the troops of errors, and remain as trophies unto the enemies of truth*.”

How many Deists have preached the religion of nature, and yet lived in the wildest violation of its holiest dictates! Who then would charge the errors of Christians on the great Founder of Christianity? who would cite them as proof against the honesty or wisdom of its early professors, any more than he would ascribe the corrupt practices of a Cornish representative to the barons of Runnameed? To the sceptic, therefore, who may read these pages with the hope of discovering in my exposure of the hypocrisy and arts of Christian empirics, objections to revelation, I shall briefly recommend an ingenious observation of a celebrated Protestant, on a similar occasion: “These persons tell us they are not the inventors of Christianity; and it may well be judged, by their way of living, that they say true: for

* Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*.

it is not probable they should have invented the precepts of the gospel, and yet live so contrary to them. Inventions always savour something of the temper and spirit of the inventors."

CHRISTOPHILUS.

LETTER I.

BLASPHEMY AND SEDITION.

To William Wilberforce, Esq.

“ Two things there be which have ever been found working much mischief to the church of God, and the advancement of truth ; force on the one side restraining, and hire on the other side corrupting the teachers thereof. But some are ready to cry out, What shall then be done to *blasphemy*? Then I would first exhort not thus to terrifie, and pose the people with a Greek word ; but to teach them better what it is.”

A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes :
the author JOHN MILTON.

SIR,—The time is now come, when an imperious sense of duty towards my fellow-countrymen demands, that I should shake off that “ dust of an ill tongue” which has so long enveloped their characters, and which has made their sufferings and fortitude the sport of the most daring ingratitude and the most shameful calumnies.

I shall address these Letters to you, Sir, from the high respect I entertain for your public and private virtues ; from your known connexion with a numerous class of British Christians, whose virtual

representative in the House of Commons you have always been regarded ; from the great influence of a public character, independent of party and office ; and, lastly, from my conviction that you are not a mere speculative admirer of Christian virtue, but that you are yourself an example of that religion you so strongly recommend to the practice of others. When the scales of political party have been evenly balanced, the preponderating weight of your character has determined the bias ; and I am one of those, Sir, however differing from you in the minutiae of politics or religion, who from my heart believe, that conscientious motives have always actuated your decisions. I believe you to be a good and a sincere man. But you well know, Sir—and flattery would not hide it from you—that your conduct has oftentimes been aspersed ; and that by many, who respected your motives, the power of your mind to withstand the cunning of those who coveted your support has been often doubted. And you cannot have forgotten that gross insult you received, not many years since, from the mammoth of political depravity, who represented you, when your honest opposition of his colleagues got the better of his discretion, as a constant mendicant in the purlieus of the Treasury, though not for yourself, but for your friends—a libel which, you are well aware, accords with this constant system of calumny on the people ; since, though surrounded by a numerous

class of relations, much below your own rank in life, and honoured by a long and personal friendship with Mr. Pitt, you rarely, if ever, solicited the value of a shilling for any one of them. Admiring then, Sir, your disinterestedness, and above all, desirous to support and extend the influence of your *religious* reputation, I address these Letters to you, and through you to the *Religious Public*: not meaning, by this designation of a large class of my fellow-countrymen, the least invidious imputation, but rather as a term of honourable distinction, and from whose comprehensive embrace I would not exclude any sect or party, nor age nor sex, who hold and prove themselves entitled to rank under so distinguished an appellation.

It has not escaped the penetration of any writer on civil or religious freedom, that the convenient bugbear of “church in danger,” and “deluge of blasphemy,” is by no means the least among the numberless auxiliaries political factions marshal in maintenance of their own impieties. Many a tottering party in power, where all other stratagems had failed, has been supported by this convenient prop: and was it not an historical excursion of too great extent, I could trace these false terrors as the chief pretexts for the imposition of religious restrictions; for the repeal of the Septennial Act—for the adoption of standing armies—for the numerous suspensions of the Habeas Corpus Act—and, in

short, for all those infractions of the Constitution which have distinguished the very worst periods of British history. It was this vile spirit of bigotry, which has so often lit the blazing faggot over the martyr's body, and stained the scaffold with the patriot's blood. It was this "cursed ungodliness of zeal" which not thirty years since surrendered up this great city to fire and pillage; and which, in a provincial town, destroyed the habitations of a distinguished class of Protestant Dissenters, and banished from his native land one of the brightest ornaments of philosophical science. But not to advert to past scenes of civil contention, over which the veil of oblivion should now be drawn—(and which never should be removed, but to warn us against their recurrence)—this grievous spirit of religious insanity may be well described in the words of Addison, as "a clamour which, pretending to be raised for the safety of religion, has almost worn out the very appearance of it, and rendered us not only the most divided, but the most immoral people upon the face of the earth."

That the renewal of these demoniac passions has for some years past been artfully attempted by a certain desperate faction, cannot have been concealed from any calm observer of passing events: and to warn the *Religious Public* against falling into the snare, is the especial object of these Letters; the immediate cause being the knowledge that many

sincere friends of her Majesty the Queen, who joined with so large a majority of the country in the noble defence against her enemies, have yet refused to attend public meetings, held for the purpose of condemning the politics, and urging the removal of the party now in power, alleging as their excuse, that highly as they disapprove of the political system of Ministers, yet that Lords Liverpool and Harrowby are friends of religion, and that religion, at this particular time, stands in peculiar need of support, from the deluge of *blasphemy* gone forth upon the Public!

A more fatal duplicity than this, or one more vitally dangerous to the interests of both church and state, could not exist: and it can only be accounted for in that intellectual cowardice which but too often accompanies a strong and evangelical sense of religion among the middle classes of society, who, unused to the freedom of philosophical inquiry, are dangerously sensitive to these spiritual *alarms*. For the private and domestic virtues of those two noblemen I entertain the highest respect; and I scorn to defame the private character of any minister for the purpose of ruining his public influence. But those virtues must not be used as scape-goats for the vices of Administration; and one would almost desire their non-existence, rather than they should be prostituted to such artful and anti-christian uses. At present they are the mere bolsters

of faction—and the only crutches of an Administration which, for mental imbecility, tottering indecision, and public detestation, is unparalleled in the annals of politics. Lord Liverpool and Lord Harrowby having, however, now so completely identified themselves with the system, they cannot be separated from it, painful as it may be to include them in the judgment: and they will rarely find even so much liberality as in these observations; for it requires a more than common credulity to discover how the upholding such a system of irreligion can comport with the professed and sincere love of Christianity. Nor could it command *my* credence, had I forgotten the darkness in which all are involved, and the charity of that divine Founder of Christianity, who, with compassion for the weakness of human judgment, implored the mercy of Heaven on his merciless enemies: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” I recommend to them the example of St. Paul, who was himself once a persecutor of religion; I would address them in the language of the prophet: “Come out of her, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues:” and I had almost included them with the *Religious Public*, to whom I am about to exhibit this pretended zeal for religion in its true light—to strip off its mask of hypocrisy—and tear the film from before the eyes of its dupes.

In the first place, the exterior cant of religion has ever been the commonest cloak of impiety. All persecutors and inquisitors have thought they acted most like Christians, when they were most barbarous in ruining those who were really such; and that no sacrifice could be so acceptable to God, as the destruction of those who most feared him. All wars against religion have been carried on under the colour of defending it; and all religious hypocrites, as Archbishop Tillotson well observes, have “lied for the truth, and killed for God’s sake.” Thus have Christians been enlisted against Christians, and the great cause they ought to unite to promote has been made to fall *felo de se*. To *alarm* the laity about their *spiritual* interests, has always enabled the Political Priest to seize their *temporal* goods; that thus, by setting the world in a flame, he might the more safely plunder in the confusion: so easily are the generality of mankind started on a cry of “Stop thief!” never heeding to see whether there really *is* a thief, until their pockets feel lighter from the industry of those who accompanied them in the chase. The *Protector*, when he dissolved his Parliament (a circumstance not altogether unprecedented in modern times), did it “by command of the Lord:” and the sum paid for every license to commit immorality to the church of Rome, that Custom-house of sin, was levied in the name and for the service of God. So says Josephus, when

the thieves and vagabonds chose themselves a high priest, and usurped power in Jerusalem, "They used the temple as a castle and defence of themselves against the people; and made the sanctuary a place for them to exercise tyranny in." The same arts have been practised in our days, and I fear but too frequently with their accustomed success; and the same scandalous attempt is made to confound the friends of freedom with those miscreants, who, taking advantage of popular commotion, have ever basely polluted its name. The French revolution, Sir, that tocsin of alarm, again rings in the ears of timidity; and the atrocities of its infernal agents are again the inexhaustible answers to every expression of discontent. But will you confound first and secondary causes? Will you impute to the writings of the French sceptics, who were only the subordinate causes of infidelity, that primary cause which originated in the gross and palpable corruptions of the government and popery — "corruptions which at last produced a monster that devoured its mother?" Will you attribute to the licentious liberty of the press, that which in fact originated in the despotic interdicts of the principles of protestantism? Will you deny that this opposition to the progress of Scriptural Christianity has in all Catholic countries tended to beget scepticism among the scientific and inquiring portion of society? No, Sir; it is to *prevent* revolution, and to avert its

attendant horrors, that all religious and enlightened men seek to overturn a party, which, for its own sinister ends, monopolizes all the patriotism and religion of the country—but bids fair, nevertheless, to extinguish both; which, by its conduct, has excited a spirit of party violence unknown in any former times, and too likely, if it continues, to prove the prelude of civil contention and bloodshed. It is to disappoint those prowling beasts of prey, who in all ages and all countries are seeking through revolution the opportunity of wickedness, that we oppose the system of Ministers. The miscreant deeds of the instruments of the French revolution can be no more charged on the friends of freedom, than the inhumanities of those cormorants who violate the wounded and the slain on a field of battle can be imputed to the heroes in pursuit of the vanquished. But, liberty of conscience, by the Treasury journals, is now accounted a pretence for rebellion: all pleas for civil freedom are deemed seditious—all arguments for religious liberty are denounced as blasphemous—and the just demand for a redress of grievances only occasions fresh encroachments on our remaining rights. The increase and aggravation of our complaints is accounted their likeliest cure—adding to our burdens the mode of lightening them—and the “healing hand of time,” the mystical hope of deliverance. Such is the state of parties; and

the men in power have now been so long in command of the vessel of the state, that they really think they govern us by prescription, and that the fee-simple and freehold possession of Downing Street “remains to them and their heirs for ever.” All legal and constitutional means of cutting off the entail are either removed from us, or proclaimed illegal; and an Irishman, with that noted philological zeal for the advancement of the English tongue which has ever distinguished him, has now added the terms “anti-ministerial,” and “traitorous,” to our collection of synonymous adjectives. Disrelish of *him* and his partners is disaffection to the King; and endeavours to turn them out of office, attempts to overturn the Constitution. By how much the more we abjure the invidious motives imputed to our conduct, by so much the more are those imputations increased;—attributing designs to us the most opposite to our views, and to the evident scope of our writings—judging of others by themselves, as if there was always a trick at the bottom of what we said or did, as if we always said one thing and meant another—sticking up the scarecrow *innovation*, (“as if new reformatations ought not to be substituted for old disorders,”) whenever we revive some obsolete unfashionable truth—and imputing to us mercenary motives, forgetting with what much greater probability they may be retorted upon

themselves, who *are* rewarded with places and pensions, with honour and authority; and who, by the bye, are, nine out of ten of them, converts, real or pretended, from our own as yet unrewarded opinions. If we express our judgment that an accumulation of debt is not an accumulation of capital — that a man mortgaging his real property cannot be increasing or securing it — that a system originating in poverty, continued in poverty, cannot end in wealth — that a continual call on our resources cannot be the most judicious mode of husbanding them — that the more we borrow the poorer we become — that disbanding standing armies, and reducing places and pensions (those rivets of faction), are the legitimate modes of reducing expenditure, and consequently taxation — that a liberal system of foreign policy is most likely to increase trade, and revive commercial enterprise, to enable us honestly to pay our debts, and to become once more a free, happy, and flourishing people; — if we speak or write these, or any of these self-evident truths, we are called “dolts and ideots,” “wild and visionary,” political jackasses, traitors to our King and country! If we observe, under the patronage and combination of foreign monarchs, *war* waged against neighbours under pretence of preserving *peace* at home, we are denounced as Jacobins. “*Tanquam majus ullum populo bellum sit, quam cum iis, qui legum feren-*

darum causâ creati, nihil juris in civitate relinquerent * :” “ As if any war were of such consequence to the people, as that which is carried on by those who, being brought into the legislature, and intrusted with the laws, overturn all law, and leave neither right nor justice in the state.” If we are dissatisfied with the discouragement of civil freedom, under a pretended care for “ social order ” — with the support of popery under an affected zeal for protestantism — if we see artful politicians and bigoted priests procuring for themselves worldly riches, and, in order to secure them, striving to keep the people in ignorance — or if we object to the appointment of this or that particular individual to ecclesiastical preferment, and to perform the *ceremonial* part of religion — we are instantly proscribed as enemies of the establishment in church and state, as disbelievers of the Christian religion, and perhaps as avowed atheists !

To such a pass are we now come ! And if the people of this country are much longer to receive the insult of such a faction, it requires no extraordinary sagacity to foresee—no spirit of prophecy to predict—that the cry of Wolf ! will at last become true, and that the state of our country will shortly resemble that unfortunate plight of the Hebrews, detailed in the last chapter of the book of Judges,

* Livy.

when “there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own sight.” Yet it is to support such a system as this, that the *Religious Public* are called upon to rally round the present Administration, in defence of their country, their King, and their religion! The old Christmas pantomime of *addressing* is got up again; and all that numerous class of underlings, described by Tacitus as the “*instrumenta regni*,” (the “court tools” of the Roman emperors,) are busily employed in behalf of the Ministry; and, in their masquerade dress of ultra-loyalty, are exciting in the minds of the friends of religion an hysterical feeling for its safety. The advocates of Christianity are craftily exhorted to lay aside all *political* feelings, and to unite hand and heart in support of that religion which, Christ tells us, “is founded on a rock, and against which the gates of hell shall not prevail;”—but which, an *Irishman* tells us, is entirely dependent on his continuance in office; and which will be utterly extinguished when the apostolic missions of Castles, Oliver, and Edwards, shall cease to stir up to righteousness the hearts of the common people! “After my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.”

The mitre and the crown are linked together. Obey God and honour the King, is thundered from the pulpit, with responses to the old tune of passive obedience, in a style not beneath Dr. Sacheverell

himself, and his borough congregation. And when one reads the Jeremiades of the hole and corner men, and the moving appeals of the Treasury scribes to the throne and the altar, the tombs of our kings, and the graves of our grandmothers, one is led to believe that these loyal diarrhœas are parodiës on ultra-royalty, by the authors of the Rejected Addresses.

But here I must close an epistle already too long. My object is not to deal with individuals, but with the system at large. I may say, with Cicero—“Dies deficiet, si velim numerare, quibus bonis malè evenierit: nec minùs, si commemorem, quibus improbis optimè:” “The day would not hold out, if I should undertake to enumerate all the good men whom evil befell; nor would it, if I should reckon up all the wicked men that have fared best of all.”

For the sake of brevity and distinction, I shall divide the subjects of my following Letters into five separate heads:—

I. As to the truth of the charge of Irreligion brought by the MINISTERS of the STATE and GOSPEL against the PEOPLE.

II. As to the religion of those who prefer the charge, as set forth in their *deeds*; and how far their system of polity accords with the principles of Christianity.

III. As to the *real* quantity and quality of the “*blasphemy*” which actually has gone forth to the

people through the medium of the Press; what means have been used by these Ministers for its discovery and suppression; and a brief contrast of the amazing mass of Religious Publication.

IV. As to the conduct of the Clergy—the only real danger of the Church.

V. As to the LIBERTY of the PRESS in matters of religion—the causes and remedies of its abuse.

To lay facts before the public on these great subjects of inquiry, is now, Sir, become absolutely necessary, from the acknowledged fear of the press entertained by the Ministry, and the consequent contemplation of some “wholesome restrictions” on its “licentiousness.” It is notorious, that with the exception of half a dozen daily papers and quarterly reviews, the whole press of the kingdom is united against the present system of Ministers. Scarce a solitary pamphlet in their favour can push its head into notice. A more undeniable test of public opinion could not be adduced: and it is plain, that if Ministers are to keep in office, the press must be silenced—both cannot exist together. Nothing is more amusing than to mark the charges of falsehood and dulness brought against it in one sentence, and the invocations contained in the next of the aid of the magistrate to protect the Ministers against its effects upon the understandings of the People. That some scheme or other affecting it will be among the first propositions submitted to

Parliament, is not, I believe, a secret to you. Perhaps the coffin and the grave are already prepared in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and a *preamble* drawn declaratory of the sacred duty of preserving a part of it inviolate for ministerial use, by a well-known undertaker of the liberties of England.

I am, Sir,

With the highest respect,

Your obedient Servant and Fellow-Christian,

CHRISTOPHILUS.

LETTER II.

AS TO THE TRUTH OF THE CHARGE OF IRRELIGION
BROUGHT BY THE MINISTERS OF THE STATE AND
GOSPEL AGAINST THE PEOPLE.

To William Wilberforce, Esq.

“Slavery has long since ceased to be tolerable in Europe; the remains of feudal oppression are disappearing even in those countries which have improved the least; nor can it be much longer endured, that the extremes of ignorance, and wretchedness, and brutality, should exist in the very centre of civilized society. *There can be no safety with a populace half Luddite, half Lazoni.* Let us not deceive ourselves. We are far from that state in which any thing resembling equality would be possible; but we are arrived at that state in which the extremes of inequality are become intolerable. They are too dangerous, as well as too monstrous, to be borne much longer. — The condition of the populace, physical, moral, and intellectual, *must* be improved, or a *Jacquerie*, a *bellum servile*, sooner or later will be the result. It is the people at this time who stand in need of reformation, not the government. The government must better the condition of the populace; and the first thing necessary is to prevent it from being worsened. It must *curb* the *sedition press*, and keep it curbed. This is the first and indispensable measure; for without this, *all* others will be fruitless.”

Southey's Letter to Mr. W. Smith, 1817.

“I have had the satisfaction of receiving the *most decisive proofs of the loyalty and public spirit* of the GREAT BODY OF THE PEOPLE; and the patience with which they have sustained the most severe temporary distress cannot be too highly commended.”

*Speech of the Prince Regent (in person) on the
prorogation of Parliament, July 17, 1817!*

SIR, — To the accusation brought against the People, that they are immersed in irreligion, and the patrons of “blasphemy,” I beg leave most abruptly

to give the lie direct. From all that I have personally seen and heard in the populous and manufacturing districts of England and Scotland, (and I possess peculiar means of personal knowledge and information relative to the quantity and influence of religious publications,) I am morally convinced that there is scarcely a shadow of ground for the imputation. I do not mean to deny that *some* attempts have been made to insinuate irreligion with the doctrines of parliamentary reform so current amongst them; but I do deny that such attempts have been made by any of their popular writers, or that they have met even with partial success in any corner of the country: but more of this in a subsequent Letter, wherein I shall expose to you the real source of the blasphemy afloat, and the *singular* impunity it has received from the law officers of the Ministry.

I will appeal to the curious reader, whether there has ever been a period in our history in which there are not traces of this stale but not unprofitable artifice, of levelling accusations on the part of the government against the people, and thus shifting the sins of the ministers from their own shoulders to those of the victims of their selfish policy. According to the political estimates of religion contained in these precious state documents, from the time of the first conversion of this island to new year's day last, Christianity has been constantly

losing ground; and, in this sinking consumptive state, the wonder is, that a shadow of its existence can be detected. With regard to our ancestors, I shall say nought: their pretended lamentations at leaving Christianity in a worse condition than they found it, were ably exposed by the late Bishop of Carlisle, in that admirable sermon on "The Progress of Religion and Science, and the Continual Improvement of the World in general," from the text, (not inapplicable to the present times,) "Say not thou what is the cause why the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this." The false and dangerous system of *villanizing* mankind, is there painted in its true colours. That the clergy of all classes should join in this clamour, is extraordinary indeed; for can they be blind to the certain reflection on themselves, who, though educated and paid to advance the religious character of the people, profess not to be able even to keep them from backsliding? "It reflects (says Milton) to the disrepute of our ministers also, of whose labours we should hope better, and of the proficiency which their flock reaps by them, than that after all this light of the gospel which is, and is to be, and all this continual preaching, they should be still frequented with such an unprincipled, unedify'd, and laic rabble, as that the whiff of every new pamphlet should stagger them out of their catechism and Christian walking."

I could venture to say, that for this century past every administration has had its *Carliles*. The works of Woolston, Toland; Peter Annett, Morgan, Paine, Houston, Daniel Eaton, of Hume, of Bolingbroke, and Gibbon, have had their successive publishers and readers — and yet Christianity still survives! Take courage, therefore, Mr. Wilberforce; and do not fear that the “Temple of Reason” in Fleet Street will supersede the revelation of JESUS.

To return to the charge, however, as affecting the People: surely the *Religious Public* cannot but be indignant at the falsehood. This libel on the country has been studiously spread by all the catcalls of the Treasury, and echoed back again by those of all others the most notoriously destitute of all religious principle. Surely this convenient and fashionable charge of the inroads of “infidelity” cannot but be regarded as a gross aspersion of, and detraction from, the public and private efforts of persons of *all* political and religious opinions, to distribute the Bible, and disseminate Christian principles. Indeed, a more palpable calumny cannot be invented; since, from the establishment of Charity and Sunday schools — of National and Lancasterian systems of education — the number of those who can read and write is a hundredfold increased. The vast increase and extended circulation of religious magazines and

tracts exceed those of any other publications ; and I shall lay before the public their almost incredible amount, as the completest refutation of the charge : and I presume it may be taken as an undeniable fact, that they would not appear in the market, were there not a demand for them. Now, can it be believed that this popular taste is co-existent with such an imputative irreligion ? If so, this avidity for religious writings is a singularly dear-bought hypocrisy by those who have confessedly but barely sufficient to keep their body and soul together. Is it to be credited, that vice keeps pace with the increase of knowledge, and that the Devil takes two strides whenever the Philanthropist takes one. If so, better at once that the King's printer should return his patent for exclusively printing the Scriptures — better that the Bible Societies should cease to translate the sacred records of truth into the different languages of the earth — that an Act of Parliament were added to our statutes at large, (though already large enough,) for depositing the Bible within the archives of the Tower, as the books of the Roman sybils were preserved in the Capitol — and that orders in council were issued, to collect and chain up all men who exercise their own reason, or teach others to burn that *candle of the Lord*, with the wild beasts of the royal menagerie : forbid the public reading of the word of God, as the crafty lawgiver of the Lacedæmonians inter-

dicted the public representation of Sophocles and Euripides, out of a feigned respect to those illustrious dramatists. All ye echoes of the Treasury, petition your Monarch, as Cardinal Wolsey did the Pope, (in Harry the Eighth's time,) "That his Holiness could not be ignorant what divers effects the new invention of *printing* had produced. And that which particularly was most to be lamented, was, that lay and ordinary men were exhorted to read the Scriptures, and to pray in their vulgar tongue. That, if this were suffered, besides all other dangers, the common people at last might come to believe that there was not so much use of the clergy; for if men were persuaded once they could make their own way to God, and that prayers in their native and ordinary language might pierce Heaven as well as in Latin; how much would the authority of the mass fall? how prejudicial might this prove to our ecclesiastical orders?" And if this "frightful phenomenon" of the "increase of latitudinarian principles" is the monstrous birth of attempts to sow the seeds of knowledge and virtue, drown all the Humane Society—repeal your laws against infanticide—blow up your asylums for the blind and the destitute—fire your hospitals and colleges—and declare your penitentiaries and societies for the suppression of vice Spencean establishments for the begetting of sedition and blasphemy;—tear down the statue of

Howard from its cathedral pedestal—burn Mrs. Fry and William Allen in Smithfield, with the paper of Mr. Brougham's Education Bill—and consume Basil Montagu, and the Christian subscribers to his society for the abolition of capital punishments, on a funeral pile of the gathered copies of Beccaria, and the Report of the Criminal Laws. Abandon the wisdom of Solon, and give us the penal code of Draco, who punished all crimes with death, thinking that the smallest transgressions deserved it, and that no punishment was more rigorous for the blackest atrocities. Burn all printers' devils, and stop every paper-mill but that of the Bank of England. Petition that none of his Majesty's liege subjects should be allowed to use their eyes (for fear of blindness) but through spectacles of state manufacture—on the principle of that philanthropist who is said to have voted for the window tax, from the Christian motive of placing the blind on a level with their fellow-creatures. And ye, ministers of religion, pray that the *times* may be brought back to those golden halcyon days of polemical light, when bishops set their (+) crosses to the creeds and articles imposed upon posterity, for lack of a writing-master; when the office of the minister was a sine-cure; and when the laity performed their parts in pantomime before images of their saints, buying their sin-sponges for all lusts of the flesh, past, present, and to come. Defile not the altars of the church

with Aaron and Moses with the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's prayer. As a rider on the late six Acts, tack another totally expunging that clause in the Bill of Rights for the public assemblage of people on redress of grievances ; and let the curfew-bell, as at the Conquest, again toll the wholesome hour of retiring to roost. Substitute for Magna Charta the old writ *de hæretico comburendo* ; and burn Hannah More on the old statute of witchcraft ; (see Hawkins's Pleas of the Crown, b. i. c. 3. on the sin of-raising the Devil). Restore again the cautelous system of *licensing*—the old *index expurgatorius* of popery ;—our necks may now fit the yoke that so galled our ancestors of old. And in the place of Sir Roger L'Estrange, commission *Dr. Slop* to be the door-keeper of the press ; and let his *imprimatur* be the only passport to that “ inspiration of the Lord which giveth us understanding.” Doubtless, nothing could be more gratifying to the palates of these political epicures than to reduce us to the condition of blind worms ! “ How goodly, and how to be wished, were such an obedient unanimity as this ! What a fine conformity would it starch us all into ! Doubtless a staunch and solid piece of frame-work as any *January* could freeze together !”

Rejoiced I truly am, Sir, in these great discoveries—and that the eyes of Ministers are at length opened to those scandalous and cheap publications, “ lottery puffs, exchequer bills, sale of bankrupts’

stock, racing calendars, bank forgeries, and insolvent schedules*.”

But why need I expose these unmerited insults on my fellow-countrymen? Can it be necessary to appeal to the fortitude and acknowledged patience with which, during the last quarter of a century, they have borne privations of the most trying and touching description? Was there ever any nation under a king, that endured with more true loyalty and religious fortitude the fiscal contributions to the most direful warfare that ever swept with a desolating scourge over the happiness of the civilized world?—wars which (whether necessary or not; it is not here my purpose to inquire,) have in their consequences undeniably produced great fluctuations in the demand and compensation for labour, and a melancholy deluge of pauperism and misery. *Taxed* from the crown of our heads to the extremities of our toes, have we ever (with the exception of a few local political irritations, excited by spies and incendiaries,) touched a crumb of our neighbours’ property or food, though often starving in the midst of plenty, and with wives and children emaciated around us? Hard is the case, Sir, where a willing labourer can get nothing for the sweat of his brow; and unknown

* For some insight into the defects and remedies of the Bankrupt Laws, see a very superior volume, lately published, entitled, “Considerations on the Origin, Progress, and present State of the English Bankrupt Laws.”

to us is the mental conflict which broke his English and independent heart to the scanty pittance of the poor-rates! During the war, no increased burthen was imposed which was not preambled with an eulogy on the loyalty and patriotic devotion of the country. The speeches from the throne, in return for *supplies*—the prayers and benedictions from the altar, on the annual thanksgivings for dear-bought victories, won by the courage and lives of the common people—implored the blessings of Heaven on this generous and forbearing people: and so long as the recruiting drum sounded its funeral knell on the bosom of the mother—so long as the press-gang tore the unlicensed freeman from the bosom of his family—so long all was flattery and gratitude. Are we, then, to be told, that without any assigned cause Britain is become a den of thieves and blasphemers? Is it to be endured, that the poet-laureate should stigmatize the people as “one half Lazaroni and the other half Luddites,” when the speech from the throne too assures us of the “loyalty and public spirit of the great body of the people, and the patience with which they have sustained the most severe temporary distress?” If Mr. Southey is right, wherefore, then, that “Carmen Triumphale” over the result of the Castlereagh policy, and on the “Pilate who weathered the storm?” and where is the reality of that swollen Babel elation which has described us “the envy and admiration of surround-

ing nations?" Is this "blasphemy" the consequence of *peace*? and was it the chastening of war, and the cupping of the war-taxes, that alone kept down this rebellious spirit against Heaven and the Throne? If so, it would be better we should rush into new wars, and preserve our political consistency towards Sweden, Sicily, Genoa, and Parga, by seizing the opportunity of a crusade with the Holy Alliance against Naples, Hayti, and Spain, and blighting those blossoms which now bloom on the tree of freedom. Is this the reward of the families of those brave soldiers who have perished in defence of their country, whose bones have whitened the plains of Europe, and who have planted the banners of Britain in every quarter of the globe? Truly this calumny comes with an ill grace from that juvenile lord of the "nursery for young statesmen," who, turning day into night, waltzes and quadrilles at Almack's, "to the soul-inspiring strains of Colinet's sweet little flageolet." He who simpers at the levities of a French play—and just leaves the Saturday opera as the last clock strikes twelve, to join a fashionable supper party—has no license to talk of "blasphemy" and sabbatical profanation. I question whether, on an average, there is not *equally* as much sense and political information among the mechanics of an English or Scotch manufactory, as at Almack's; and though, in point of pedigree, they may not be able to afford a purchase at the Herald's

Office, or to draw cheques on the reputation of their ancestors to mend the holes in their own—yet are they

“ The sons of Adam and of Eve—
Let Bourbon or Nassau go higher.”

Mr. Southey, whose “ early predilections” owe much to the friendship and favour of the dissenters, (and who might himself appear a more frequent example in the parish church of Keswick,) has no need to insult a large class of his countrymen, by alleging, as one cause of this “ blasphemy,” that the people are “ dry nursed in dissent.” And yet this same Mr. Southey can write the *Life of John Wesley*, (a very saleable article in Paternoster Row,) the queen bee of the whole sisterhood, and the dry nurse of the most active employ; and can exhibit that zealous Christian as having humanized whole districts in Staffordshire, and other thickly populated parts, whose inhabitants were before impervious to any moral or political check. How can he reconcile this piece of biography, the *Letter to Mr. Smith*, and the *Regent’s Speech*? I shall leave him to settle this with his Royal Master—and to escape, as well as he may, from his own contradictions; and give him the choice of which horn of the dilemma he thinks least hurtful to his Court side. The truth is, Sir, that the passages and holes of the Treasury are overrun with a certain vermin called a Treasury beagle—a species of political pimp, (some magistrate

or receiver, well known in every provincial town throughout the kingdom,) whose business it is to report the opposition and ministerial force of his neighbourhood: their evident interest is to blacken the character of the former, and to exaggerate the weight of the latter in property and rank—this makes the labourer worthy of his hire—and an account of all that is “respectable,” is a set-off against numbers. Hence arises much of this cry about “blasphemy,” which is for the most part the creature of the brain or the fears of these Treasury beagles; and is so often repeated, that at last it often perhaps deceives even the minister himself. And when our liberties were abridged on the anonymous communications of A and B from the roof of a night post coach, no wonder this *viva voce* perjury against the character of the people obtains credence, and creates alarm in the same quarter.

The Administration has lost one of its ablest auxiliaries—one who never lost the opportunity of defamation. I shall take the liberty of calling *that* real “blasphemy,” which makes the sanctuary of public liberty the theatre of mockery to the people’s sufferings or errors; and which by misplaced “pleasantries” over the physical sufferings of unfortunate age, has been said to afford a singular accomplishment of Scripture prophecy, in the prediction, 2 Peter, iii. 3: “That there shall come in

the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts." And when I call to mind the speeches I have heard on the Lisbon job, and the many returns to the embraces of his quondam and disconsolate friends—when I reflect that her Majesty the Queen left the country partly from his advice, and that true honour commanded him to stand by her in the hour of trial—I cannot think the foreign clime of opposition at all congenial to the incomparable temper and pliability of his nature. I confess I am reminded of an apophthegm of my Lord Bacon, who relates, that one day expressing to Gondomar his desire to be rid of the burden of honours, and to lead a private life, Gondomar answered him, " That he would tell him a tale of an old *rat*, that would needs leave the world, and acquainted the young rats that he would retire into his hole, and spend his days solitarily,—and would enjoy no more *comfort*; and commanded them, upon his high displeasure, not to offer to come in unto him. They forbore two or three days: at last, one that was more hardy than the rest, incited some of his fellows to go in with him, and he would venture to see how his father did; for he might be dead. They went in, and found the old rat sitting in the midst of a rich Parmesan cheese! So Gondomar applied the fable after his witty manner." (103.)

Before I close this Letter, I must dig still deeper

towards the root of the evil; and remark on that gross ignorance of the principles of Christianity and human nature, which represents a *natural* aversion of religion as inherent in the mind of man: and in this observation I have no relation whatever to the origin or nature of sin. Man is a religious creature: and in the disbelief of this fact originate half those puling *alarms* for the safety and retention of revelation. The denial of his superstitious nature is scarcely credible in those who have read, in every page of history, his strong, innate, unconquerable propensity to piety and devotion. No possessions have been so devotedly defended as the altars of our native gods; and it is a singular fact, that most ancient and modern conquests have been more or less permanent, as they respected the religion of the conquered. From Romulus to Napoleon, experience has dictated this needful policy; the language of ambitious conquerors has always been—"Give us your liberties and your property, but keep your religion." And on the other hand, history exhibits to us the most cruel interminable warfare waged on its behalf. Not only the Jewish records, but all history, sacred and profane, prove, that where there was not the knowledge of God, *in spirit and in truth*, the nations of the earth have prostrated themselves before graven images. The oracles of old, and the shrines of saints, bear witness to the credulity and liberality of our religious dispositions;

and the catalogue of divinities was as comprehensive as the ark of Noah.

“Jussit quare—templa ruunt antiqua deorum?”

Cats have raised sieges, where all the arts of war had been resorted to. When Troy was in flames, “Æneas left his wife to take care of his gods.” The “Dii immortales” were the classical incentives to patriotism and self-devotion : and to this sensitive part of our nature Cicero and Demosthenes poured forth their eloquent appeals. The Druid, the Dervise, and the wandering Pilgrim, have ever been welcome guests in the humble and lonely cottage. And when we walk through our National Museum, and see the gods of Egypt, Mexico, and Indostan—when we contemplate those magnificent remains of Grecian sculpture consecrated to religion and the deities of Athens—when we traverse the plains of Salisbury, and see those tumuli over our pious ancestors, and those striking ruins of the Druidical worship of our forefathers—who can doubt the religious inclinations of human nature? The poetical judgment of Milton describes our first parents at their morning devotions in the open field of nature—

“But first from under shady arborous roof,
Soon as they forth were come to open sight
Of day-spring, and the sun ——
Lowly they bowed, adoring.”

And again represents them at their evening worship, as appearing under the canopy of heaven, and

naturally receiving the inspiration of religion from the glorious objects around them—

“ Thus, at their shady lodge arrived, both stood,
Both turned, and under open sky adored
The God that made both sky, air, earth, and heaven,
Which they beheld; the moon’s resplendent globe,
And starry pole: thou also mad’st the night,
Maker Omnipotent.”

Lord Bacon says, “ The contemplative atheist is rare.” It is notoriously a question with most divines, whether there really exists such a non-descript as a real atheist in the world. If there be one, I can only compare the mind of such a *lusus naturæ* to that first state of the earth “ when it was without form and void.” But, in the uncertain and problematical state of the question, I may safely say—surely there needs no provision against *this* monster.

Let me ask you, Sir, who were the thronged and pressing multitudes at the parables and miracles of our Saviour—who were that great multitude who “ spread their garments in the way, and others cut down branches off the trees, and strewed them in the way, and went before him, crying, Hosannah! blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!” and bore our Saviour in triumph to Jerusalem? All their prejudices against him were stirred up by the Scribes and Pharisees. The Scripture tells us (Luke, xiv. 10.) that “ the chief priests and Scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And “ Pilate,

when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers of the people, and said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people : and, behold, I having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof you accuse him. They cried out at once, Crucify him, Crucify him !” The history continues, (v. 27.) “ There followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed him.” Jesus was elevated on the cross ; (v. 35.) the people stood “ beholding him : and the rulers also with them, deriding him.” And when those last awful circumstances had taken place, what says the history ? (v. 48.) That “ all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts and returned.” Again, Sir, who was it who with relentless animosity followed up their impieties, and had the sepulchre watched, “ lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead ?” The first evangelist will answer the question, (xxvii. 62.) “ The chief priests and Pharisees came together to Pilate !” It was not the Jewish priesthood, nor those in authority, who fostered the Son of God ; but rather the ignorant fishermen of Galilee, those humble penitents, who “ stood by the cross weeping.” These were the disciples, who, “ when he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven,

worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

Thus, Sir, you see that the people had, as usual, less to do with "*blasphemy*," and the Scribes and Pharisees more, than may have struck you before. And if this holy and admirable religion was designed by our Saviour for, or zealously adopted by any particular class of mankind, it was by the poor and unlearned. Was it Pilate, or Herod, or Felix, or Agrippa—was it Titus, or Nero, or Julian the Apostate—who fed the flock of Christ? No, Sir; it was the People, who flew to it with open arms, as the Gospel, *εὐαγγέλιον*, or *good tidings*. It was the people, whom Peter, in his first eloquent description of the Christian hope, exhorted to save themselves from that "untoward generation," (Acts, ii. & xl.) (the Scribes and Pharisees;) "and they (the people), gladly receiving his word, were baptized, and the same day were added to the disciples three thousand souls." It was on the miracle of the man restored, (Acts, iii. & ix.) "that the people saw him walking and praising God, and were filled with wonder and amazement." And as the "apostles spoke unto the people," (iv. 1.) it was the priests and the Captain of the temple and the Sadducees, "who came upon them, being grieved that they (the apostles) taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead. And they (the priests, Captain, and Sadducees,) laid hands on them," and put them in hold until the next day. "Howbeit

many of them (the people) which heard the word, believed ; and the number of these men was about five thousand." On the succeeding occasion, (Acts, iv. 32.) the " multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul, and with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." You cannot but know, Sir, the sequel of this apostolic history, and what drove the first planters of Christianity from this fertile soil of its early growth. You cannot but recollect that there came a " multitude out of the cities round about Jerusalem," bringing the sick and the afflicted ; and that " then the High Priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and were filled with indignation ; and laid their hands upon the apostles, and put them in the common prison." You will recollect that " the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand forth and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life ;" and that when liberated, and teaching in the temple, the " High Priest came, and they that were with him," and called the " Council together ; and all the Senate of the children of Israel pursued them, and took counsel to slay them," and had them " beaten, and commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus." You will remember, Sir, that in the ministry of Stephen, " There arose certain, in the synagogue, Libertines, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians," (a holy alliance),

“and were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the Scribes; and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against the holy place and the law. For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.” The High Priest then put the question, “Are these things so? They then cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran in upon Stephen with one accord; and cast him out of the city, and stoned him. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem.”

Here, Sir, is a revelation; and let him that has eyes to see, see. I have said enough, without risking any inferences; and shall now leave this argument in the hands of the Gentiles. We do not find that Pliny, Suetonius, or Tacitus, adopted this persecuted religion. The Scribes and Pharisees stood aloof from it; nor did the great men of the earth meddle with it till the worldly alloy had encrusted it: the philosophers were not converts till the spirit of popery added Platonism to it, as a bait

for the proud academic. No, Sir; it was the *Common People*, “whose greatest crime,” says Pliny, “was on a certain day to meet together and sing hymns to Christ as to a Deity, and afterwards bind themselves together by a common sacrament not to commit any immorality, but to live justly, without theft, adultery, or other sin.” It was the courage and understanding of the *People* that planted the cross of Christ on the heathen temples, and their invincible constancy that finally triumphed over all persecutions. Thus writes Tertullian, in that beautiful testimony to their fortitude: “Exquisitior quæque crudelitas, illecebra magis est sectæ; plures efficimur quoties metimur à vobis; semen est sanguis Christianorum:” “The cruelty of their enemies did but increase their number; the harvest of their pretended justice was but the seed-time of Christianity; and no seed was so fruitful as that which was steeped in the blood of martyrs.”

Now, Mr. Wilberforce, I put it to your understanding: If Christianity thus survived its early infancy—when neither honourable, profitable, nor popular—when it was the derision of philosophy, and the contempt of learning—when the wit of the age was arrayed against it—when hated by the priesthood, and persecuted by the magistrate—I ask you, Sir, if Christianity was thus enabled to triumph, by the support of the common people under the favour of Heaven, whether you or any

one will dare to tell us that it is now in danger, when the public prejudices, the learning, the wealth, and the whole influence of the country, and still further, when the shield and buckler of the Attorney-General, are on its side? It is in vain to tell me of apostates, blasphemers, and infidels : they are far more thickly strewn among “ Walpole’s Royal and Noble Authors.” Jesus Christ tells us it is difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Who then, Mr. Wilberforce, will get there, if the *common people* miss their way? And think you the blind can lead the blind? Let the *People* then journey by themselves. Give them the *Bible*, and do you lead the way on the high road. If they choose not to follow, “ who usurps the judgment-seat of Christ?” If knowledge is power, *ignorance* is the *devil*. Teach them to *read*, the rest will follow in due time.

I am, Sir,

With the highest respect,

Your obedient Servant and Fellow-Christian,

CHRISTOPHILUS.

LETTER III.

ON THE RELIGION OF THOSE WHO HAVE MADE THE CHARGE OF "BLASPHEMY AND SEDITION" AGAINST THE PEOPLE; AND HOW FAR THEIR POLITICAL SYSTEM ACCORDS WITH THE PRECEPTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

To William Wilberforce, Esq.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and behold a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

JESUS CHRIST, *Matt. vii.*

"As soon as corruption ceases to be an expedient of government, (and it will cease as soon as a patriot king is raised to the throne,) the *panacea* is applied: the spirit of the Constitution revives of course; and, as fast as it revives, the orders and forms of the Constitution are restored to their primitive integrity, and become what they were intended to be, *real barriers* against arbitrary power, not *blinds* nor *masks* under which tyranny may lie concealed. Men decline easily from virtue; for there is a devil too in the political system, a constant tempter at hand: a patriot king will want neither power nor inclination to cast out this devil. Under him the people will not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well; for by rendering public virtue and real capacity the sole means of acquiring any degree of power or profit in the state, he will set the passions of their hearts on the side of liberty and good government. First, then, he must begin to govern as soon as he begins to reign. His first care will be, no doubt, to *purge his court*, and to call into the administration such men, as he can assure himself will *serve* on the same principles on which he intends to *govern*."

Lord BOLINGBROKE'S "*Idea of a Patriot King*."

SIR, — Neither the object nor the space of this Letter will admit of an essay on the principles which have governed the different administrations of the

last reign. Indeed, my desire has been, as much as possible, to avoid all subjects of party difference and prejudice, and merely to consider the present political system, so far as it relates to the influence and authority of Christianity. Before I descend, therefore, to the details of *real* “blasphemy,” I shall merely put it to your Christian heart to inquire, In what consists the Christianity of that system which is fast cutting our country into two unequal and opposing divisions, the rich and the poor; breaking down all those intermediate gradations of society which are the sinews and the ligaments of the political body; and which is engendering an unexampled spirit of party animosity and violence, in defiance of that last and solemn commandment of Christ, “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye *love* one another, as I have loved you” — an animosity which no Christian or patriotic Englishman can view without feelings of the deepest sorrow, and the certain consequences of which cannot but appal the apprehensions of those who know and fear the desolating scourges of civil war? Where is the Christianity of that system which, with the most vile and unjustifiable selfishness, is anticipating the property of posterity, laying burdens on the child unborn, and reconciling us to the dangers of their financial bubbles with the assurance that they will last

our day, caring nothing for the explosion of their *expedients* over the heads of our children?

“Blest paper credit! last and best supply,
That lends corruption lighter wings to fly!
Gold, imp’d by thee, can compass mighty things,
Can purchase states, can fetch and carry kings!”—POPE.

But, to follow my pursuit of “*blasphemy*,” I think I shall discover a trace of it in that profusion of *oaths* still sanctioned by the Legislature in the Excise, the Customs, and the processes of the law—impieties which, though ludicrously styled by the Author of the Commentaries “pious perjuries,” are in my sight hourly violations of the Divine commandment, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” I shall trace it again in the system of those who “consider Old Sarum an integral part of the British Constitution”—who in numerous boroughs septennially sacrifice victims on the altars of Moloch—who return, as “duly elected,” the representatives of those who, having sold themselves to the highest bidder, consummate their treason to their country in the following blasphemy of God: “I have not received or had by myself, or any other person whatsoever in trust for me, or for my use and benefit, directly or indirectly, any sum or sums of money, office, place,

or employment, gift or reward, or any promise or security for any money, office, employment, or gift, in order to give my vote at this election; and that I have not been before polled. *So help me God.*" (Bribery Oath, Stat. 2 Geo. II. c. 24.) So much for the blasphemy carried on *out* of doors; and a late penal Act against bringing Parliament into "contempt," coupled with a natural deference towards the powers of the Attorney-General, alone prevents my tracing the *sale* of these blasphemous wretches under a similar invocation of the Deity.

I can also discover "blasphemy" in that cruel and unaccountable adherence to the punishment of death, against the united opinions of the theoretical philanthropist and the practical thief-catcher, by which such numbers of unprepared souls are hurried into futurity; and in the system of those who, while they are annually increasing the bulk of our penal code, have done scarcely any thing for its revision, and nothing for the promotion of a national scheme of education, which is, in fact, the only effective *prevention* of crime. "The ancient wisdom of the best times did always make a just complaint, that states were too busy with their laws, and too negligent in point of education."

I shall detect "blasphemy" in the intermeddling of the *Clergy* with secular affairs, contrary to that solemn vow made at their ordination, to give themselves "wholly to their vocation." *Thou cannot*

worship God and Mammon. And I shall again discover it in the encouragement given to their worldly lusts, by filling up the quorum and magistracy from the clerical body : by imposing on them the ungracious task of dispensing common law, an office naturally thankless in the eyes of the people, and peculiarly opposed to the charity and passive virtues of what *should* be the character of the Christian minister ; an employment which wastes that time which it steals from visiting the poor, the sick, and the dying, on the mysteries of Burn's Justice, now become more necessary than the study and explanation of the Bible ; which perplexes them with the inconsistency of praying for the safety of their flocks on the Sunday, and committing them to prison for a violation of the *Game Laws* on Monday ; which has notoriously made the clerical character an object of political and personal antipathy in every village throughout the country ; and which has associated with the library of his parsonage-house feelings appropriate only to the purlieus of Bow Street. Ye professors of the gospel, who thus commit adultery with the world, read that epistle of the Gentile Apostle to the Corinthian Church, whose deacons he counselled : " If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church." And if the Secretary of State for the Home Department reads his Bible, as *he* pro-

fesses, mark the insult he thus offers, in thus pointing you out as the “*least* esteemed in the church!”

I shall again detect a glaring blasphemy in those who employed a British Clergyman in a late *dispersion*, and killing, and maiming of the people—in directing and overlooking it, in defiance of Christ’s warning to *his* disciple, “Peter, put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword!”—a “blasphemy,” in violation of all those practices of the primitive church, the professors of which would not even witness public executions, or even gladiatorial shows, lest, as Theophilus says, “they should become partakers of the murders committed there*.” And yet this pseudo-political Christian

* Tertullian, who may be mentioned next in order of time, *strongly condemned the practice of bearing arms.*—I shall give one or two extracts from him on this subject. In his dissertation “on the Worship of Idols,” he says: “Though the soldiers came to John, and received a certain form to be observed, and though the centurion believed, yet Jesus Christ, by disarming Peter, disarmed every soldier afterward: for custom never sanctions an unlawful act.” And in his “Soldier’s Garland,” he says, “Can a soldier’s life be lawful, when Christ has pronounced that he who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword? Can one, who professes the peaceable doctrines of the gospel, be a soldier, when it is his duty not so much as to go to law? And shall he, who is not to revenge his own wrongs, be instrumental in bringing others into chains, imprisonment, torment, death?”

Cyprian, in his Epistle to Donatus, takes a view of such customs in his own times, as he conceived to be repugnant to the spirit or the letter of the gospel. In looking at war, which was one of them,

minister is rewarded with the emoluments of the Establishment! He is not, I presume, so *steeled* to shame as to pretend to cure the *bodies* of the laity, whatever empirical receipts he may have for the diseases of their *souls*. There is still another sample of "blasphemy" to be produced from this quarter; namely, that spiritual polygamy which grasps pluralities and commendams, among those non-resident absentees, who, undertaking to feed the flock of Christ, carry the tenth of its food away, and grudge it even the benefit of their personal example as a pattern of virtue, never giving a thought to the exhortation of Peter, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as

he speaks thus: "Suppose thyself," says he, "with me on the top of some very exalted eminence, and from thence looking down upon the appearances of things below. Let our prospect take in the whole horizon, and let us view, with the indifference of persons not concerned in them, the various motions and agitations of human life. Thou wilt then, I dare say, have a real compassion for the circumstances of mankind, and for the posture in which this view will represent them. And when thou reflectest upon thy condition, thy thoughts will rise *in transports of gratitude and praise to God, for having made thy escape from the pollutions of the world*. The things thou wilt principally observe will be, the highways beset with robbers, the seas with pirates, encampments, marches, and all the terrible forms of war and bloodshed. When a *single murder is committed, it shall be deemed, perhaps, a crime; but that crime shall commence a virtue, when committed under the shelter of public authority, so that punishment is not rated by the measure of guilt, but the more enormous the size of the wickedness is, so much the greater is the chance of impunity*."

being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to his flock." 1 Ep. v. 2.

I can trace irreligion in that bigoted adhesion to a system which excludes Catholics and Protestant Dissenters from the public *Universities*, so impolitic towards the interests of the Establishment, and so glaringly unjust towards the Catholic, whose ancestors founded and endowed those colleges, and whose advantages they bequeathed to their posterity, solemnly sanctioned by acts of parliament; a bigotry which (as if the various characters of men's minds, the passions and frailty of most, the self-love, pride, and vain conceit of our own opinions, common to all — as if the constant and intimate acquaintance with men and books of our own preconceived opinions, the avoidance of all writers and persons differing from us — as if all these unavoidable causes of dissension and error were not sufficient to set mankind by the ears) endeavours, by operation of law, to widen these natural breaches of charity, and perpetuate ignorance, by pounding up the Conformist in his own stagnant opinions, and by driving the Dissenters to their narrow seminaries of dogmatical education, where they learn to riddle and sublimate truth: thus opposing that quick circulation and collision of the products of different minds, which the whole history of human nature proves to encourage the spread of knowledge, and the consequent increase of virtue.

How much zeal has thus been lost to the Christian church, and how much festering uncharity has been engendered, it would be difficult to estimate, and scarcely possible to credit.

The same "blasphemy" is discernible in those civil disabilities for conscience sake, so abhorrent to the genius of Christianity, and which cast on it the flagrant disgrace of having left the rights of mankind in a worse condition than it found them; a blasphemy, which builds up again those partition walls that Christ broke down, when he gave to the world a revelation, making no difference of people, tribe, or nation; but, in the all-comprehensive language of the apostle, excluding "neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but all are one in Christ Jesus." No species of bigotry is a greater outrage on the spirit of revelation. Locke, the real friend of the Establishment in church and state, truly says: "The boundaries on both sides are fixed and immoveable. He jumbles heaven and earth together, the things most remote and opposite, who mixes these two societies, which in their original, end, business, and in every thing, are perfectly distinct and infinitely different from each other*." Christianity deserves the countenance and support of the state; but the belief of the majority of a country may be treated

* First Letter on Toleration.

as the system of the national church, sanctioned and adopted by the state, without any disabilities, being politic or just towards those who dissent from its forms or doctrines. That which is the distinctive character of the Christian revelation, as opposed to all human impostures—which constitutes its most irrefutable evidence—is its capacity of adaptation (so to speak) to all nations and all ages of the world; but if speculative opinions are to be the tests of our attachment to our native country, and of our capacity for civil office, what a curse has the Deity sent among us; and if every one who dissents from the ceremony or particular doctrine of a church, is to be robbed of the honourable title of Christian, what becomes of the argument founded on the universal spread of our religion? No; Christianity meddles not with the forms and models of civil government; but leaves them as it finds them, to be made suitable to the law of nature, and to the genius and welfare of the People to which they belong. It accords with the law of nature, discountenancing despotism and anarchy—it can live under all forms of civil policy—it flourishes in every soil and climate, and blossoms with equal beauty in the torrid and the frigid zone. It forbids tumults, seditions, conspiracies, and massacres, whether originating with the people or their governments. It demands rule according to the law from Kings, and rational allegiance in the People. It

commands *prayer* for the afflicted, and especially for the sinner, that the Lord would turn his heart from wickedness. This is the catholic spirit of *Christianity*.

I shall again, therefore, discover “blasphemy” in the instruments selected for these anti-christian bigotries: in the base prostitution of the Lord’s supper, that sacred emblem of concord, that holy legacy of Christ to the whole Christian community, as the test of eligibility to civil office, and the sacrilegious food of a devouring appetite for sinecure and place—the abandoned profanation of the type of love as the black flag of hatred. “For as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till he come. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of this bread, and drink of that cup.” (1 Cor. xi. 26.) A prostitution which, after all, cannot accomplish its end; for it may make hypocrites, and cannot make converts; it may keep out the honest and the scrupulous, but cannot scare the apostate or the perjurer; and is, therefore, a mere bounty on hypocrisy; making the Church of England like Noah’s ark, a place for the clean and the unclean, binding us in “the unity of spirit and the bond of duplicity.” No barrier of this sort has ever impeded base ambition, from the time when

the see of Rome waxed wealthy, and Prætextatus, its Pagan prefect, is reported to have said, "Make me a Bishop of *Rome*, and I will be a Christian too!" and when, as Father Paul writes, "the spiritual part was forgot, and nothing but the profits regarded." This is the "blasphemy,"—

"Which binding polity in spiritual chains,
And tainting piety with temporal stains,
Corrupts both state and church, and makes an oath
The knave and Atheist's passport into both*."

I shall discover "blasphemy" in that policy which makes religion the kept mistress and strumpet of the "Holy Alliance"—which struck out of our public prayers the name of a reputed sinner without trial or inquest, in the teeth of Christian principles, which command us to offer up more frequent and earnest prayers for the wandering sinner.—which thus holds up Christianity to the scorn and scoff of those who represent it as a mere state machine of bad governments—which makes the Church of England a paste-board house built of court cards, and its liturgies prayers for kings, queens, and knaves;—a policy which exhibits Christianity as the shuttlecock of nominal Christians, who, because

* The ancients appear to have had their conscience-salve in the same mental reservations of the modern Jesuit:—

Ἡ γλῶτς' ὁμωμοχ', ἡ δὲ φρεὶν ἀνωματος.

"My tongue has sworn, but not my mind."

EURIPID. *Hippol.* l. 612.

they have read or believe the history of Jesus Christ, conceive themselves practising his morals; and who, in the words of Bishop Fell, “ can give no better account of the swaddling clothes of their infancy, and why they took upon them Christ’s livery, than that they wear such garments as the common fashion of their country prescribes them.”

I shall discover “ blasphemy” in that nest of *rats*, who, having “ turned their backs upon themselves,” having deserted all *their* “ early predilections,” are now quoted, by an Irish viscount, as the disinterested witnesses to his patriotism and wisdom! I can see “ blasphemy” in these political fornicators, who barter away the liberties of their country for blue ribands, garters, and knighthood; and who, by the rabid virulence with which they defame the friends they have deserted, seek to raise themselves in their own sunken estimation; who are indeed (like Dr. *Slop*) genuine Jacobins; and whose fury for their present opinions can only be compared with the violence of their former tenets. Thus it is that vicious zeal throws up its combustion: and, as in the case of the sons of Zebedee, when the explosion has spent itself, a fall ensues, like that which befell Peter!

“ And loud and upright, till their price be known,
They thwart the King’s supplies to raise their own.”

These are the men who, with *vice* imprinted on their head, have brought shame and degradation on the most learned and dignified profession of the country, exhibiting it as a mere bank of apostasy, where the drafts of the Treasury are duly honoured. With what colouring of religion will ye white-washers of “blasphemy” varnish over this matchless turpitude of *patricide*? “We don’t hear that Judas knew the High Priests, till he came to do business with them.” But lest the coroner of Oldham should record a verdict against me of “wilful murder,” under Lord Ellenborough’s Act, “the black act,” I shall (in the Christian language of Lord Russell to his enemies in court) pity them, and wish them well; and had rather that their own *consciences* should reckon up the particulars wherein they have sinned—to which, and the mercies of God, I leave them. Think not, reader, that I honour them too much by believing in the existence of *conscience* as any part of their composition;—I earnestly hope that they have yet some portion of it left—that it will remain a mirror of adamant, reflecting their sins, which no treachery can get rid of—a demon no man can cast out—their prosecutor, judge, jury, witness, and executioner!

These, Sir, are a few of the *real* blasphemies of the times. And if you wish further evidence of zeal for religion and discountenance of blasphemy, mark it in the vile seductions of lotteries and

gin-shops—those national decoys and preserves of vice—those snares and pimps for glutting the severities of our penal code ;—which are continued in open defiance of every law, human and Divine, to supply the unnecessary and profligate expenditure of the State.

Such, Sir, are among the blasphemies of the present day ; and putting the charge upon the People is something like the impudence of the pickpocket who turns on his pursuers with the cry of “Stop thief !” It reminds one of the devil rebuking sin. If this is Religion, I will henceforth glory in the distinction of infidel. The calumniators of the People may understand *Priestcraft*, but know little of Christianity : they care little for the Constitution, however they may love the *Commonwealth*. To deny that they *belong* to a Church, is impossible ; but it is, as an old author says, in the same sense as a jackdaw who builds his nest in the steeple ; they *look up* to a Church—to the weathercock on its spire—to discover how the wind blows, and so to conform themselves.

Thus, Sir, I have exhibited to you *facts* ; and facts which I hope will convince you, that whatever may be the intention of our calumniators towards Christianity, they are most unfortunate in its application ; and never can I concede to them the character of Religion, so long as the Bible forms the rule of the Religion of *Protestants*, and a “ Bill to

revise, amend, or repeal certain obsolete statutes, commonly called the Ten Commandments," has not received the assent of the successor of the "Most High and Mighty Prince, James, by the Grace of God King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith," &c. ; and so long as the said Commandments are by Act of Parliament, and "his Majesty's special command, appointed to be read in Churches."

There is one other point, Sir, I shall but barely allude to, as exhibiting proofs of the saving faith of our Rulers : I mean the prosecution of *her Majesty the Queen*, and the consequent deluge of obscene and odious associations with vice to pollute the minds of youth. So early as the time of Aristotle it is noted,—“That a lawgiver ought above all things to banish all filthy discourse out of a city; for men easily go from saying filthy things to doing them.” This abomination cannot fail to aggravate that dissoluteness, which is the deplorable evil of the day, and the moral pestilence of female prostitution which now stalks abroad, to the disgust of all good men, and the degradation of England, and has sufficient political cause for its existence, without quickening it with the addition of this scourging plague. But lest I should be accused of appealing to the feelings of the moment, I shall dismiss this fruitful source of reproach, knowing that you yourself, with a large majority of the “virtual” represen-

tation of the People, represented to your Sovereign, "*that perseverance in these discussions could not but be derogatory from the dignity of the Crown, and injurious to the best interests of the People!*"

With respect to the immoralities of the Press, I am sure you will agree, that the shameless attacks on private character which are every day practised with impunity by the Treasury writers, towards all those who oppose the Ministers, call for the detestation of every lover of truth. But think not I would call down the vengeance of the law on even this "filthy splashing of vulgar abuse." No; rather let it fly the advertiser of its own impure origin. Yet, let these calumniators reflect, that should their excesses provoke a retaliation on *private* character, their game is one at which two can play: the annals of the Jockey Club and the gaming table, and the orgies of Bacchus, will afford ample means. And though the *Courier* daily posts the ladies of noble birth who visit Brandenburgh House, it might prove an awkward retort to spy out all the visitors of Carlton House, the Cottage, and Pavilion; to inquire into the times, the places, the purposes, and repetitions of these visits; to drop inuendoes and suspicions against all who enter in at the gates. By such vile conduct the exalted moral character of the King himself—his splendid virtues as a son, a husband, a father, and a friend—might be exposed to the same slander, as the virtues of the Queen,

described by Mr. Canning—"the life, the grace, and the ornament of society." I am one of those, Sir, who hold that the veil of mystery should surround the private character of the Monarch. I am not for dragging forward to public gaze the frailties of Royalty, but had rather decently inter them in the tomb of the Capulets. And while we are on this subject, let it not be forgotten that the character of a *King* is of far more import to the morals of his subjects; for "The higher a man's birth is," says Juvenal, "the more exalted he is in dignity, and the more enormous is the crime he commits:"

"Omne animi vitium tanto conspectius in se
Crimen habet, quanto major qui peccat habetur*."

And let not *Princes* think they can escape this obligation to purity of private character. *Cicero* writes: "Nec enim tantum mali est peccare principes, quamquam est magnum hoc per seipsum malum; quantum illud, quod permulti imitatores principium existunt: quo perniciosius de republica merentur vitiosi principes, quod non solum vitia concipiunt ipsi, sed ea infundunt in civitatem. Neque solum obsunt, quod ipsi corrumpuntur, sed etiam quod corrumpunt: plusque exemplo, quam peccato, nocent."—*De Leg.* lib. iii. c. 14. "This takes place especially with respect to *Princes*, and so

* Sat. viii.

much the more, because the consequences of their bad actions are very fatal to the State, from the great number of persons who endeavour to imitate them.”—And though those “useful fictions” of the law may pronounce that the King can do no wrong, yet, with the Bishop of London’s leave, there is a tribunal and a time “when the Kings of the earth shall stand before the judgment seat of God, and when *He* will execute judgment on *All*, and of all the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him*.”

* The Bishop of London seems to have dived into the mysteries of the law, and to have studied well the last edition of Blackstone’s Commentaries, with Mr. *Christian’s* ultra-loyal notes: he appears vastly impressed with the “attributes” of the King—ascribed to him by the fictions of the law; with his “ubiquity,” “immortality,” and “*impeccability*.” “Besides the attribute of sovereignty, the law also ascribes to the King, in his political capacity, absolute *perfection*. The King can do no wrong.” “The King, moreover, is not only incapable of *doing* wrong, but even of *thinking* wrong.”—*Comm.* vol. i. c. 7. Being myself a student of the law, and suspecting the Reverend Prelate of a too literal interpretation of the text, I may perhaps be allowed a short commentary on this “absolute wisdom” and perfectibility.

Judge Fortescue, and all our constitutional writers of authority, lay great stress on the *limited* nature of the English monarchy: indeed, its original conformation was but a few removes from democracy. The noble principles of freedom in the institutions of our Gothic ancestors built up, in Parliaments and Juries, impregnable barriers against regal despotism; and our charters are not *grants* from the liberality of our Kings, but rather declaratory of liberties founded in the common law, existing from time immemorial; and frequently forced from despotic Princes, who had unconstitutionally usurped possession of them. The principle of the Constitution, that “the King can do no wrong,” so far from originating in despotic power, has the very contrary implication: it is expressly called by Fortescue *impotency*:—

One cannot but expose the hypocrisy of those who bawl out the profanation of the sabbath by

"Sed propter privationes in adjecto *impotentia* potius denominandum."—*De Laudibus Legum Angliæ*, c. 14. All power originates from and is held for the People, says that admirable writer. The King was never trusted with the power of doing wrong. Ministers were *formerly* held responsible to Parliament: Parliament being *then* the real representation of the People, the law, supposing it would ever remain so, held it impossible for a Ministry to commit an unconstitutional act with impunity; and, holding the purse-strings, judged it might safely grant a visionary inviolability to the King, as essentially necessary to the exercise of his high prerogative: hence originated the old saying—"England can never be undone, but by her Parliament." How far this responsibility survives, or how far Parliament is the representation of the People, see "Oldfield's History of Boroughs." In the "Commonwealth of England, by Sir Thomas Smith, Secretary of Queen Elizabeth, 1601," I discover what it once was—"The Parliament of England, representeth, and hath the power of the whole Realme, both the head and the bodie. For every Englishman is intended to be there present, either in person, or by procuration and attorney, of what preheminance, state, dignitie, or qualitie soever he be, from the Prince, (be he King or Queen,) to the lowest person of England. And the consent of the Parliament is taken to be every man's consent!"—In justice, however, to his Grace of London, it should be acknowledged, that he is not singular in this vulgar notion of impeccability: I find that a Dr. Cartwright, (not the old Major,) Bishop of Chester, asserted in a sermon, "that the King's promises were free donatives, and ought not to be too strictly examined or urged, and that they must leave his Majesty to explain his own meaning in them."—*Rapin*, vol. ii. p. 754.

Bishop Warburton relates with some humour, in a Letter to Hurd, a rebuke he received at a Royal Levee, from an old courtier, Colonel Robinson, for having the indecency to say he had heard that the King (George II.) was not well. To which rebuke, says the Bishop, I answered—"I perceive then, Colonel, there is some difference between your master and mine. *Mine* was subject to all human infirmities, sin excepted: yours is subject to none, sin excepted."

There is an anecdote of Bishop Berkeley, the well-known author of the *Metaphysical System of the Non-existence of Matter*, not

Sunday newspapers, when it is notorious that legal and *royal* business is transacted on a Sunday, and that Cabinet dinners then hold their inquests over the liberties of England. I well know the weight of public business, so honourably accomplished by the first lawyer who ever graced the woolsack ; but

altogether foreign to this subject. The Bishop contended, that sensible material objects, as they are called, are not external to the mind ; but exist in it, and are nothing more than impressions or shadows made upon it by the immediate act of the Deity. In 1714, he was seized with a violent fever ; and Dr. Arbuthnot, writing to Swift, has a little pleasantry at the expense of the Bishop's imagination : " Poor philosopher Berkeley has now the *idea* of health, what was very hard to produce in him ; for he had an *idea* of a strange fever on him so strong, that it was very hard to destroy it by introducing a contrary one."

I have before expressed myself that there is a respect due to the chief magistrate of the country, without which no government can be maintained. " But this I can defend, without being of opinion, that Kings came down from Heaven with crowns upon their heads, and the People were all born with saddles on their backs : I own I am none of Issachar's asses, nor should I be willing to be governed by the Czar of Muscovy : I don't think, if a King wanted to walk across a dirty highway, his Majesty might command twenty or thirty of the heads of his followers to be cut off, to make steppings for his sacred shoes : I profess myself a dutiful subject to the Crown of England, and in that word I mean, to what head soever on which the *Parliament* of England shall place the crown ; but I own no King who shall ever wear it without consent of Parliament, no King who shall, after such consent, employ the power of it to the destruction of the law and Constitution of the nation ; who shall invade the property of the subject, invert the public justice, or overthrow the religion and liberty of England. Such a prince is a tyrant, and may be *deposed* by the same power that placed him on the throne ; and hereditary succession, pretended divine right, supreme power, or other matter, cause, or thing, to the contrary in any wise notwithstanding." —*Preface to DE FOE's Jure Divino*. That admirable poem and satire is now almost lost in the dust and neglect of the book stalls ;

we are not to be crocodiled out of our Christian liberty by a Levite, who thinks there is one law for the rich and another for the poor: and, perhaps, it would give much relief to the learned Lord alluded to, and make his Sunday more a day of rest, if he, who seems so encumbered with his own conscience, were eased of that fiction of law which imposes upon him the keeping the King's; and were relieved of the inconsistency of giving judgment in the House of Peers on *appeals* from his own Court: he might also be relieved from the task of issuing polite congés d'élire, in addition to the labour of dispensing secular law, and thus be better enabled to attend to his legislative duties: I cannot help suspecting both the law of God and man would be better tended. But, at all events, let us not receive these rebukes

but having been one of the main props of the Revolution, I will close this long note with a short extract, for the benefit of those *foreign* members of the "Holy Alliance" who are now so zealously upholding legitimacy.

" *But Kings are Gods!* that title own they must,
Like him be sacred, and like him be just;
If o'er the last the vicious lust prevails,
The sanction dies, and all the Godhead fails;
His high deserts a jest, a ridicule,
And he's more vile than those he ought to rule;
Abandon'd to his crimes, he ought to find
Himself abandon'd too by all mankind:
With the *Assyrian* Monarch turn'd to grass,
As much a tyrant, and as much an ass;
I know no meaner, abject, monstrous thing,
Than an *exalted Devil* made a King."

from those who rarely behold the interior of a church, except to qualify for place or pension, and to avoid the clutches of the informer; who are thus frugal of their public devotions—apprehensive, I presume, of that reflection on the Pharisees of old, that they spare their prayers at home, to the end that they may be liberal in public. Thank God, the decency, order, and pious observance of Sunday by the People needs not the confirmation of the court newsman, or the Mirror of Fashion in the Chronicle. I happen to know of a legal apostate, one of the last *solicited*, who was enticed into the trap at one of the Cabinet feasts of the *Pass-over* above alluded to; and this cant of sabbatical profanation brought to my mind the story of a loose woman, who wrote to the Pope a case of conscience—whether she was obliged to execute her cat for killing a *rat* on a Sunday!

Thus, Sir, have I brought blasphemy home: and if a Bishop, on his road from Exeter to Lincoln, spoke the truth, when he is reported to have said, that the devil was abroad among the *People*; I think I have shown that he walks on *both* sides the road;—and

“Bad as *he* is, the *Devil* may be abus’d,
Be falsely charg’d, and causelessly accused,
When men, unwilling to be blam’d alone,
Shift off those crimes on him which are their own.”

One of the most pregnant evils of the really corrupt Press, is, that the principles of the *Revolution*,

which placed the present family on the throne, are daily slandered and denied, in senseless commendation of the battles of Peterloo and Bonny Muir. Every petty pilfering of a mob is dignified with the name of treason, and the right of resisting tyrants confounded with the crime of sedition. As ultra-loyalty is busy, it may not be amiss to quote those sentiments of Sidney, (written long before the Guelphs were even heard of) which promoted that royal family from Hanover to St. James; and they are quoted without the slightest reference to the present times, but to preserve the recollection of wholesome truths:—" 'Tis ill that men should kill one another in seditions, tumults, and wars; but 'tis worse to bring nations to such misery, weakness, and baseness, as to have neither strength nor courage to contend for any thing; to have nothing left worth defending, and to give the name of peace to desolation. I take Greece to have been happy and glorious, when it was full of populous cities, flourishing in all the arts that deserve praise among men: when they were courted and feared by the greatest kings, and never assaulted by any but to his own loss and confusion: when Babylon and Susa trembled at the motion of their arms; and their valour exercised in these wars and tumults, which our author looks upon as the greatest evils, was raised to such a power that nothing upon earth was found able to resist them: and I think it now miserable, when

peace reigns within their empty walls, and the poor remains of those exhausted nations, sheltering themselves under the ruins of the desolated cities, have neither any thing that deserves to be disputed among them, nor spirit nor force to repel the injuries they daily suffer from a proud and insupportable monster*.”

Such are the immutable truths, and the memorable lessons, taught by history. And, says a Greek writer, “After treating of our duty to the *gods*, it is proper to teach that which we owe to our *country*. For our country is, as it were, a *secondary* god, and the first and greatest *parent*. It is to be *preferred* to parents, wives, children, friends, and all things, the gods only excepted : and if our country perishes, it is as impossible to save an *individual*, as to preserve one of the fingers of a mortified hand.”

“O FREEDOM! sovereign boon of Heav’n!
Great charter with our being giv’n!
For which the patriot and the sage
Have plann’d, have bled, thro’ every age!
High privilege of human race,
Beyond a mortal monarch’s grace!”

I am, Sir,

With the highest respect,

Your obedient Servant and Fellow-Christian,

CHRISTOPHILUS.

* *Discourses on Government*, Sect. XXVI. Civil wars and tumults not the greatest evils that can befall nations.

LETTER IV.

AS TO THE REAL QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF THE "BLASPHEMY" WHICH ACTUALLY HAS GONE FORTH TO THE PEOPLE THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF THE PRESS; WHAT MEANS HAVE BEEN USED BY THESE MINISTERS FOR ITS DISCOVERY AND SUPPRESSION; AND A BRIEF CONTRAST OF ITS AMOUNT WITH THE AMAZING MASS OF RELIGIOUS PUBLICATION IN THE SAME PERIOD.

To William Wilberforce, Esq.

"Some generals of old have endeavoured to take towns by treachery, by corrupting some of the garrison; and they have done it several ways. Some have sent of their own men as fugitives into the town, thereby to put them into credit and authority with the enemy, and give them opportunity to betray them. Some by this means have discovered the strength of the garrison, and by that discovery have taken the town.—*Nicholas Machiavel's Art of War*, chap. vii. To corrupt a garrison, and take it by treachery,

SIR,—I have before admitted the existence of irreligious publications to a certain extent; and I had almost said that I did not regret their existence, for the sake of the striking contrast they afford to the cotemporaneous zeal for the support of Christianity. The comparative insignificance also

of the numbers and effect of these publications, proves the distaste of the public mind for infidelity more incontestably than could have been effected in any other way. There are, however, very peculiar circumstances attending what I should term their *forced* circulation ; for certain I am, that no appearances warranted even a suspicion that they were welcome in any corner of the kingdom.

You cannot, Sir, be ignorant, that insinuating infidelity through the medium of the political press is one of the deepest arts of political craft. The minister of the day has not a more true or useful friend, than the fiend who takes advantage of popular irritation to propagate irreligion. It not only blights the spirit and effect of all opposition to his schemes, but it causes that defection from the ranks of his opponents, which must be produced whenever means are afforded of creating alarm ; and originates the most effective class of ministerial supporters, well known in the political vocabulary under the designation of *Alarmists*. The Religious Public will naturally sink their political differences in the common support of Christianity. And a large portion of them, unused to the freedom of speculative and philosophical research, are inclined to accede to restrictions on the press, which, though apparently tending to stay the plague, do but in reality increase it. It is not, however, here my intention to discuss the remedies of irreligion. I

shall briefly, therefore, call your attention to the circumstances which have made political knowledge an object of greater interest than in the last century. First of all, instructing the people in reading and writing would naturally beget a more extensive curiosity and interest in the public conduct of their affairs. To this may be added the awful and alternate changes of warfare, in which scarcely a single cottage in the kingdom has escaped the loss of some inmate. The financial difficulties attending those wars, and the consequent variation in the demand for labour, have necessarily subjected the poor to great deprivations and sufferings; and it is well known, that ever since the American and French revolutions, there has existed an increasing avidity for political information. An extraordinary manufacturing system has collected together large masses of artisans, whose knowledge and ingenuity are scarcely credible to those who, never merging beyond the purlieus of Downing Street, are totally ignorant of the real state of the country, except from the information gathered from such pure sources as a Castles, an Oliver, or an Edwards. The growing sense and influence of religion among these large classes of the community was, until the last four years, universally acknowledged. In a preceding Letter I have sufficiently exposed the imputation of "blasphemy," with which they are now visited.

I need not, however, go further back for a vindication of the People, than to the middle of the year 1817, when the speech from the throne, as before quoted, which was delivered by the Regent in person, declared: "I have the satisfaction of receiving the most decisive proofs of the loyalty and public spirit of the *great body of the people*; and the patience with which they have sustained the most severe temporary distress, cannot be too highly commended." I need not enter into the details of the green bag, the A. B. C. protocols, or the enactment of the six acts; but certain it is, that up to the close of 1817, *blasphemy* was scarcely heard of. Whatever political sins Mr. Cobbett or Mr. Wooler might have to answer for, to change the religion of the people seemed no part of their object: indeed, every politician who writes for popular effect well knows the impossibility of meddling to any purpose with religion in a country where it is of various growth, and where the people are divided into such deep-rooted sects and opinions. The disinterred bones of "Tom" Paine were never exhibited as relics of blasphemy, but only as the remains of a political saint.

The parodies of Mr. Hone were the first war-whoop of the Ministry. His trial and acquittal are fresh in your recollection; and though Mr. Hone defended his right of using religious forms of worship as the vehicle of political parody — all other

parties, high and low, having done the same — yet, by discontinuing the sale of these parodies *before* any information had been filed against him, he obviated in a great measure the necessity of any prosecution — made the only reparation in his power, by suppressing them, in deference to public opinion—and was finally acquitted by three different juries of his countrymen, on the ground that his intent had no more to do with blasphemy than Mahometanism. I mention these facts, Sir, as due to the character of Mr. Hone; because, through his whole life connected with the press, he neither before nor since, ever in any way connected himself with that department of publication.

Now then, Sir, came forward the real author of the “blasphemy,” who appeared and disappeared from the political atmosphere under such extraordinary circumstances as call for the most marked attention.

At the close of 1817, W. T. SHERWIN, utterly unknown to the political press of the metropolis, first advertised and placarded a weekly publication, *The Republican*; but soon discovering this was not after the “taste of the present age,” it was quickly metamorphosed into “Sherwin’s Political Register.” Now, mark, Sir; in a year of unprecedented political prosecution no notice was taken of this herald of sedition! The walls were placarded with the pith of his lucubrations; he weekly and

openly advocated a change of government, from the monarchy to a republic ; he printed, published, and *personally* sold, in a little hole in Fleet Street, (No. 183,) these publications, and ultimately promoted and established Carlile as his *publisher*. Carlile, this mere jackall of the tiger, was originally a journeyman tinker, ignorant and illiterate even in the commonest details of vulgar knowledge, who had been a distributor of *The Register*, but who now became the convenient scape-goat of his employer. Their first joint production was a reprint of the parodies Mr. Hone had suppressed. An *ex-officio* information was filed against Carlile, but never tried. *The Register* proceeded ; the same flagrant attempts to push radicalism into republicanism ; open and undisguised attacks on all the forms and principles of Christianity ; exhortations to the devilish crime of assassination ; engravings and descriptions given of those very pikes for the possession and use of which so many houses of the poor were searched, and for the use of which one misguided Scotchman forfeited his life to the offended laws of his country ; the reprint of Colonel Titus's " Killing no Murder," with the name of Sherwin as the printer, and sold in his scape-goat's shop. Then followed the reprint of Paine's " Rights of Man," a work which the most extravagant opinion for the liberty of the Press could not justify, in a country where the monarchical form has so long and so glo-

riously existed, and in the preservation of which all orders of society are alike interested. Emboldened with the impunity of a six months' circulation, the "Age of Reason" was then printed and publicly offered for sale. And by the ill-gotten gains arising from this scandalous neglect of the exercise of the law, the scene of publication was removed to "The Temple of Reason," No. 55 in Fleet Street, where the public were for a year insulted by exhibitions in the windows, such as had never before escaped immediate prosecution. On the dispersion of the Manchester meeting, a direct and unequivocal exhortation to treason and revolt was written with the signature of Mr. Sherwin, and printed by him: the People were then supposed to be ripened to a requisite excitement. W. T. Sherwin retired from the editorship of *The Register*, to enjoy the well-earned fruits of his patriotism—resigning the continuation of his labours into the hands of his wretched dupe! Then, Sir, was Carlile brought to trial, and delivered over to the vengeance of the law, after a two years' impunity of blasphemy, during which no single week had elapsed when he would not have merited and received a verdict of "guilty of blasphemy and sedition" from any jury in any part of the country.

It has been said that this arch-blasphemer, Mr. Sherwin, could not be made amenable to the law, from his cunning avoidance of all vending and pub-

lishing. But, Sir, it is notorious that he lived near Islington—possessed printing presses—employed several journeymen—weekly accounted with Carlile for profit and loss—daily sent trucks and cart-loads of his printing from his private residence to Fleet Street—made no secret of his avocations to many persons in London; and is there a human being who will deny that one quarter per cent of the money lavished on Oliver, Castles, and Edwards, would not have purchased one *spy* to convict *this* midnight owl, as the author, and printer, and proprietor, of these base attempts to corrupt the minds of the People? Not only was this open to the law officers of the crown; but Edwards, that well-known compositor in the Cato Street conspiracy, was almost daily in Carlile's shop, lodged opposite to him, wormed himself into his confidence, actually moulded and cast the figure of Paine, so prominent in the shop, was the maker of the little images hawked about the streets, and daily possessed himself of what was coming in and going out! Yet Mr. Sherwin, his weekly visitor, was permitted to escape; and with his honest industry has opened an establishment in a respectable part of the city, adorned with religious books on “grace,” and baptism, and Shakspeare's plays, “All's well that ends well!” congratulating himself on his ingenious extrication! and, perhaps, often flattering himself that he is not *the* late Mr. Sherwin, of Fleet Street.

What process of adult baptism has converted and regenerated this child of grace? and by what *minister* was he *confirmed*?

I put it to the feeling of every man who loves his country, his religion, and his laws, whether this culpable neglect of the law can be justified? These facts are notorious to hundreds in London; and I ask any man, whether the application of the law in the first instance would not have prevented all that subsequently occurred for three years?

Sir, it is at all times a violation of our best feelings to drag private character before a public ordeal: but one who has acted so public a character can have no pretensions to so premature a retirement. What security have we, Sir, that this insidious apostle of "blasphemy" will not renew his apostolic missions on similar opportunities? Sir, I think *you* are bound, by your professed love of religion, to urge a Parliamentary investigation of this mysterious subject. I conceive Ministers bound, by *their* professed abhorrence of "blasphemy and sedition," to assist you in this investigation: it is a sacred obligation due to the injured character of the People; and if Ministers do not yield every possible assistance, the unavoidable inference must be, that "blasphemy" is a most useful ingredient in the political cauldron, where the system of a new and doubtless improved liberty is concocting. If this *Mr. Sherwin* be a penitent, let him make a public confession of his

sins : if still abiding in his iniquities, let the *State* do her duty to repress them. An imperious sense of duty, Sir, on my part, has urged this public citation; for it cannot be endured, that, for the sake of an individual, the *People* should rest quiet under the bitter calumnies heaped with no sparing hand upon them, in this their day of burden and reproach. I know nothing of this self-dubbed Patriot and Reformer, of his origin or pursuits, except from the murmuring whispers which an ear not willingly shut may easily hear; and I have, therefore, studiously confined myself to *facts* of public notoriety.

Thus, Sir, I have exposed to you the sole and polluted source of this exaggerated “blasphemy,” which has, after all, disseminated only a few paltry reprints of Palmer, Diderot, Voltaire, Volney, Paine, and often-refuted and long-forgotten English sceptics—in the total, I will venture to say, not amounting to the sale of Dr. Chalmers’s volume on the *Evidences of Christianity*. And, with respect to the class of society amongst whom this miserable trash has circulated, if we deduct the portion sold to the curious and speculative men in the higher and more educated ranks, a remnant only remains for the lower classes of society, which, compared with the innumerable religious publications monthly and annually dispensed to the people, is but as a grain of sand to the myriads of the sea shore. Sir, I write from correct and thorough information now before

me; and I affirm, that there cannot be a more monstrous falsehood, than this blasphemous taste imputed to the people. It contradicts the most notorious facts and the most evident character of the times: and you, Sir, well know that it is asserted by the very same men who prefer the charge of infidelity, that there is an increase of evangelical religion. You know that, both in the church and out of it, the latter tenets are discouraged by the present Ministry, and that excess of Methodism is the fear of their minds. You well know, that from the first accession of the Dundas influence up to the present moment, evangelical religion has been opposed in Scotland, and all preferment withheld from its professors: you know that the “wild men” have been snubbed, and the moderates advanced*.

* I cannot refrain from noticing here, as part of the same system, a circumstance which lately excited great disgust in a midland county. A certain nameless apostate, well known as the *Guilford Rat*, lately informed an unfortunate female criminal, that as *he* could not hold out to her any hope in this world, so he took the opportunity of intimating to her, that in his opinion she had little to expect in another—and that the wild and visionary opinions of the vulgar Christianity would sadly disappoint her reliance on them! I thought of the following passage in Bishop Fell:—“It is indeed to be wished we would cease to invade God’s peculiar, by judging those that must stand or fall to him: but if we will needs take his *office*, it is but equitable we take his *rulers* too; and in our *wrath* remember *mercy*. But God be blessed, it is the judgment of our upright, yet gracious Master, that shall finally determine us; and not that of our passionate fellow-servants: if these were irreversible, and the key of the bottomless pit were in our custody, we might give Satan a Writ of Ease, discharge him from his perambulations; he would need no more to walk about as a *Lion*, but might still lie in his *den*; and we should bring in *prey* enough to glut the devourer: for could we *execute* all we *condemn*, we might, as the Disciples, question—*Who then can be saved?*”

You cannot have forgotten the early and rancorous opposition of the majority of the ruling party to the *Bible Society*, merely because founded on a principle of filiation and comprehensive charity : and although it has since received a partial support from some of them in occasional attendance at the Meetings, yet you cannot be the dupe of a craft, which after failing to strangle an infant in its birth, merely adopts it, “to make the best of a bad job.” You must have seen the honours of the mitre adorning the heads of those who had most violently opposed it, and shunning those who had been its most ardent friends. Mark the ministerial respect for the passive virtues of Christianity in the promotion of those Christian warriors, the Reverend Mr. Hay and Sir Bate Dudley * !

Again, Sir ; as to this charge of “blasphemy ;” consider, before you admit it, the increased zeal of the Establishment and the sectaries. See them vying with each other in the useful dissemination of their respective religious opinions ; turn to the Laureat’s “Life of John Wesley.” Ask those who know the habits of the agricultural and manufacturing population, and ask yourself, whether the English people are not a religious nation ? Mark the decent and pious observance of the Sunday throughout the

* *Pluralities* and non-residents were never heard of in the primitive ages, and it is a shame there should be so many fat parsonages, and yet so many *lean* parsons. It is the devil’s market where churches are bought and sold, and such *spiritual hucksters* deserve to be whipt out of the temple.—*Religio Bibliopola*.

kingdom! See the churches and the chapels rising up in all parts! Inquire into that incredible mass of religious publications from charity schools—Bell and Lancastrian systems of education—Bible and Tract Societies—and ask yourself, whether the imputation of blasphemy is deserved by any class of society?

I now proceed, Sir, before closing this Letter, to give you the most clinching proof that the charges brought against us are mere calumnies. "It would be endless were I to lay before you the details of every class of religious publication. You know that several hundred distinct periodical works on religion, conducted by individuals, are in monthly circulation. You know that there are innumerable societies in the three kingdoms, of every cast and sect of Christianity, forwarding with ardent and judicious efforts the great object of religious education. The united efforts of all these associated bodies, in their total amount, it is impossible to calculate. I shall, therefore, select only four of the most extensive and wealthy (as irrefutable arguments in proof of the *religious* character of the times), because they are the four supported by *all* denominations of the British Church universal.

I. *The Society for promoting Christian Knowledge.*—The number of Bibles, Common Prayer Books, Tracts, &c. dispersed by the Society,

between the audit April 22, 1819, and the audit April 20, 1820, is as follows:—

3797 Packets of Books sent to Members, on the terms of the Society ; consisting of—

Bibles.....	31,756
New Testaments and Psalters	53,653
Common Prayers.....	87,884
Other bound Books.....	76,203
Small Tracts, half-bound, &c.....	940,014
	<hr/>
	1,189,510

Packets of Books issued gratuitously:—

Bibles.....	842
New Testaments and Psalters	1714
Common Prayers.....	1259
Bound Books.....	2019
Small Tracts, half-bound, &c.....	40,950
	<hr/>
	46,784

Books and Papers issued for gratuitous distribution by the Society:—

Directions for a Devout and Decent Behaviour in the Public Worship of God	in 8vo. 5032
Ditto	in 12mo. 84,111
Stonehouse's Admonitions, a <i>broad sheet</i>	10,000
Papers on Sunday Schools.....	20,000
— on the Church Catechism	10,000
— Invitations to Church	20,000
— on Confirmation	20,000
	<hr/>
	169,143

The total Number of Bibles, &c. distributed on the Terms of the Society, and gratuitously, is:—

Bibles (<i>exclusive of the Society's Family Bible</i>)	32,598
New Testaments and Psalters	55,367
Common Prayer Books.....	89,143
Other bound Books	78,222
Small Tracts, half-bound, &c.....	980,964
Books and Papers, issued gratuitously	169,143
	<hr/>
	1,405,437

This Society has therefore issued, in this “ blasphemous age,” *two millions, eight hundred and ten thousand, eight hundred and seventy-four* articles on the Christian religion !

II. *The British and Foreign Bible Society.*—The number of copies issued from March 31, 1819, to March 31, 1820, is—

115,775 Bibles,
141,108 New Testaments.

Making a total, from the commencement of the Society’s issues, of more than *two millions, five hundred and fifty thousand* Bibles and Testaments. The following extract of the last report requires no observation : —

“ At home the prospect is equally encouraging. Notwithstanding the extraordinary pressure of commercial difficulties, and the industrious propagation of irreligious, and even anti-christian opinions, the resources of the Society, so far from suffering any serious diminution, have been very liberally maintained ; and its operations, viewed on the great scale, have kept pace with the activity and efficiency of the most prosperous eras of the Institution. *Never was the demand for the Scriptures so great and general* ; and at no period were means provided in such abundance for printing editions of them, or channels opened in so great a variety of places for their free and general circulation. These

assertions are so completely sustained by the facts which your committee have reported, that they appeal to them with confidence, as affording matter for the most devout gratitude and the most cordial satisfaction. The *craving desires* which have been expressed for the word of God, and the thankfulness which has been uttered when this desire has been gratified, have been uniformly associated with those principles and feelings, on which are founded loyalty and contentment, subjection to principalities and powers for conscience sake, and a quiet and peaceable demeanour in all godliness and honesty."

III. *The Prayer Book and Homily Society.* — The last report of this Society (1819-20) speaks of the encouragement they receive—"when they see such an increasing zeal in numbers to distribute, and hear, in many instances, of such a willingness in others to receive, these plain and simple expositions of Scripture doctrine."

The issue of Prayer-Books, Psalters, and the Book of Homilies, from this Society's depository, during the last year, has been as follows: English Prayer-Books, 9,372; Irish Prayer-Books, 170; Welsh, 333; Greek Prayer-Books, 12. Of enlarged Psalters, 978 copies have been issued; of common Psalters, 448. And during the same period, 171 copies of the Book of Homilies in octavo have been disposed of; 82 in duodecimo;

and in folio, 15; — making the total issue of bound books, during twelve months, 11,581.

Of Homily tracts the committee report an *increased* issue, to the amount of 4000. The whole number of these, together with the articles of religion in the same form, which have been sold or distributed since May, 1819, is 34,545. Of the Ordination services, 179 copies have been sold; making the entire number of these large works, issued during twelve months, *thirty-four thousand, seven hundred and fourteen*.

IV. *The Religious Tract Society*. — This Society, in the last year, ending May, 1820, has alone disseminated upwards of three hundred different works on religious subjects, and not one of them on doctrinal points. Of one particular tract, “Extracts from the Life of Thomas Paine,” *one hundred thousand copies* were circulated within three months from the time of its first publication!

The total number of tracts issued since the last report, amounts to *five millions, six hundred and twenty-six thousand, six hundred and seventy-four*; making an *INCREASED* distribution of *one million, five hundred and eighty-three thousand, three hundred and fifty-three*, during the past year.

It will be observed, that these are only *annual* reports of societies of many years’ establishment;

and that no notice has been taken of that amazing branch of bookselling—the trade in old or second-hand books. There is not a stall in London where the passenger may not learn of its proprietor that the religious department of literature is his most extensive and profitable business. The *Whole Duty of Man*, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, the *Holy Living and Dying*, and the *Book of Martyrs*, are to be found in every alley in London: and I have the authority of the first divinity booksellers, in asserting the advance in value of old divinity, already the most expensive class of books. The increase of modern divinity, I think, I may be allowed to consider amply proved; and it will be observed, that I have not included in the account the Royal proclamations against obscenity and dissoluteness of manners.

If these facts do not amount to a moral demonstration on this point, I am at a loss to conceive from what quarter stronger evidence could be collected to establish the truth of any proposition.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant and Fellow-Christian,

CHRISTOPHILUS.

LETTER V.

AS TO THE CONDUCT OF THE CLERGY—THE ONLY
REAL DANGER OF THE CHURCH.

To William Wilberforce, Esq.

“Indeed, 'till spiritual and secular concerns be reduced to their proper ranks, which are now mixed and confounded, the better to disguise the preposterous subordination of the noble to the inferior; till we have forgotten the unhappy *chymistry* of turning *all*, even *Religion* itself, into *gold*, we must never hope to get out of the furnace; our *flames* will still grow fiercer, and with this unnatural effect to consume not the *dross*, but the purer *metal*.—BISHOP FELL's *Causes of the Decay of Christian Piety*, 1677.

SIR,—It is with the most painful reluctance I sit down to the part of my subject which this Letter is to contain—fearful lest I should undermine the respect and influence due to the clerical character, or appear to confound the virtuous portion of the Clergy with those worldly-minded and meddling priests who have affixed such a stigma on their honourable profession. But the power they possess of exciting fears and panics in the minds of credulous persons, and the active part they have

lately taken in calumniating and persecuting the People, requires the strongest antidote to their poison. Viewing them, too, as the composers, movers, and seconders of the great proportion of the ultra-loyal addresses, it is impossible to pass over much of that delinquency to which, otherwise for the honour of our common faith, one would wish to shut one's eyes.

Having made ample exposure of the falsehood of their accusations, and having also enumerated many glaring instances of their intermeddling with secular concerns, it will not be necessary for me here to enlarge on that head. In a religion established by law, in the possession of splendid emoluments and dignities, it cannot be a matter of astonishment that the Clergy who are candidates for its distinctions should feel every inclination to strengthen the arm on which they lean. They have ever been skilful in discerning *the signs of the times*. It is an old saying, that men should come into Court with clean hands ; and though it is rather invidious to visit the sins of our ancestors on posterity, yet it cannot but be observed, that their past and present conduct has been so thoroughly consistent, that as a body they possess no equitable claim for indulgence. They have been the tools of Popery and despotism—the advocates of passive obedience and non-resistance—the opponents of the Reformation and the Revolution—have ever endeavoured to ease the

People of their liberty, and to rid their monarchs of the cramp of Parliaments. In short, from the earliest to the latest period their conduct has tallied with Rapin's description of their principles and practice in the reign of Charles II:—"The Clergy particularly distinguished themselves by shewing their attachment to the principles and maxims of the Court, and seemed to make it their business to surrender to the King all the liberties and privileges of the subjects, and to leave them only an unlimited obedience. According to the principles publicly preached, no Eastern monarch was more absolute than the King of England." (Vol. ii. p. 725.) An ecclesiastical history is not, however, the object of these pages; and I shall therefore be content with referring the curious reader to the histories of his country, to the numerous tracts which appeared on the right of the Bishops to vote in Parliament, and particularly to a rare pamphlet of great ingenuity and research, entitled, "A Short View of the Conduct of the English Clergy, so far as relates to Civil Affairs, from the Conquest to the Revolution, 1737." Bishop Burnett, who knew them well, has not been very tender of their reputations; and in the tracts of Gordon and Trenchard they are stripped naked for the public view.

To their conduct in the present times I have already alluded. Its *impolicy*, to say nothing of its anti-christianity, is too glaring to escape the obscur-

vation of the commonest pretender to sagacity. At a period when all men and things are rapidly advancing on the great road of improvement—when knowledge is making the most rapid strides—they are often retrograding, or at any rate acting as if time were standing still. Deaf to the awful warnings of the last century, they are walking blindfold to the brink of a precipice. When the finances and public credit of the country are in the most imminent danger, when nothing but the most rigid and cautious economy can possibly avoid the ruin staring us in the face—the Clergy make themselves objects of national antipathy, as if anxious to afford a plea for sequestrating the property of the Church to the relief of the State. When encompassed about with sectaries, and (as they say) with infidels, they narrow the passages to the Church, and block up the doors of its entrance. The more bitter the political animosities which rage around them, the more eager are they to mix in the fray ; and, instead of conciliating, they appear only anxious to push on measures which inevitably tend to irritate and increase their opponents, and to thin the ranks of their friends. A more senseless and insane career never was run in an Indian muck ; and their bitterest enemies could not desire a more certain or speedy self-destruction. The evil consequences of this total estrangement of their time and attention from their sacred calling are notorious, in the fact of

scarcely a solitary work of standard criticism or biblical learning having emanated from the Church during the last twenty years. But, to make up for this deficiency, they can doubtless boast abundance of political pamphlets, which amply show their readiness to serve as the automatons of the minister of the day. Never was the lamentable effect of this diversion of the pursuits of the Clergy more apparent than in the late prosecution of the Queen. When pointedly called upon for their opinions and knowledge on one of the gravest questions of morals ever brought before a British Legislature, the heads of the Church exhibited an ignorance that would have disgraced the commonest beaters of the "drum ecclesiastic" among the ranters. There was wanting even the slightest attempt to distinguish and discriminate the religious and political principles of the institution of marriage : no one seemed even to know when, where, how long, or to what extent, the Church had claimed jurisdiction on the subject ; and the most vulgar errors were betrayed on passages of Scripture which the junior student of a divinity class (if such a thing now exists) ought to blush to appear ignorant of. Great facility was seen in making up their minds to vote for the *State* ; but though many could declare the Divorce Bill repugnant to the law of God, it was wonderful to observe, that their consciences could not permit them to vote for its rejection, but urged them to adopt a

negative policy as a *religious* mode of extricating themselves from so distressing a dilemma! Never was there a more practical demonstration of the irreligion, the absurdity, of mixing up the spiritual with the temporal character. The reader of parliamentary antiquities is aware that the original right of the Bishops to sit and to vote in Parliament has long been a subject of controversy. That they have now by prescription, sanctioned by the statute law, the possession of that right, cannot be denied ; but even to this day it has been customary for them to retire on votes in *capital* cases : and I may perhaps be allowed to say, without the idle charge of innovation, that recent events have proved that their total emancipation from the burden of civil business could not but prove highly advantageous to the real interests of the Church. I put it to the reflecting reader, whether some of the following objections to their votes as Spiritual Lords were not fully verified on a late occasion? They are extracted from a “ Printed Abstract of Nine Reasons of the House of Commons against the Votes of Bishops in Parliament, printed by order of a Committee of the House,” 1641.

“I. Because it is a very great hinderance to the exercise of their ministeriall function.

“II. Because they doe vow and undertake at their ordination, when they enter into holy orders, that they will give themselves wholly to that vocation.

“ III. Because counsels and canons in severall ages do forbid them to meddle with secular affaires.

“ IV. Because the twentie-foure Bishops have a dependancy upon the Archbishops, and because of their canonicall obedience to them.

“ V. Because they are but for their lives, and therefore are not fit to have Legislative power over the honours, inheritances, persons, and liberties of others.

“ VI. Because of Bishops’ dependency, and expectancy of translations to places of greater profit.

“ VII. The severall Bishops have of late much encroached upon the consciences and properties of the subject. And they and their successors will bee much encouraged still to encroach, and the subject will be much discouraged from complaining against such encroachments, if twentie-six of that order bee to bee Judges upon these complaints. The same reason extends to their legislative power, in any Bill to passe for the reformation of their power upon any emergent inconvenience by it.

“ VIII. Because the whole number of them is interested to maintaine the jurisdiction of Bishops ; which hath beene found so grievous to the three kingdomes, that Scotland hath utterly abolished it, and multitudes in England and Ireland have petitioned against it.

“ IX. Because Bishops being Lords of Parliament, it setteth too great a distance between them

and the rest of their brethren in the ministry, which occasioneth pride in them, discontent in others, and disquiet in the Church."

There is here matter for great reflection; and although I (of course) do not concur in the *eighth* reason, yet this much I may say, that if the conduct of the Clergy is not speedily reformed, it *will* become one of the most cogent and unanswerable: that the effect of it *in terrorem* may produce that reformation, is my most sincere prayer*.

I am one of those, Sir, who regard the protection

* "But seeing the evangelical precept forbids churchmen to intermeddle with worldly employments, what interweavings, or interworkings, can knit the minister and the magistrate, in their several functions, to the regard of any precise correspondency? Seeing that the churchman's office is only to teach men the Christian faith, to exhort all, to encourage the good, to admonish the bad, privately the less offender, publicly the scandalous and stubborn; to censure and separate from the communion of Christ's flock the contagious and incorrigible, to receive with joy and fatherly compassion the penitent; all this must be done, and more than this is beyond any church authority. What is all this, either here or there, to the temporal regiment of weal public—whether it be popular, princely, or monarchical? Where doth it intrench upon the temporal governor?—where does it come in his walk?—where does it make inroad upon his jurisdiction? Indeed, if the minister's part be rightly discharged, it renders him the people more conscionable, quiet, and easy to be governed: if otherwise, his life and doctrine will declare him. If, therefore, the constitution of the Church be already set down by Divine prescript, as all sides confess, then can she not be a handmaid to wait on civil commodities and respects; and if the nature and limits of church discipline be such as are either helpful to all political estates indifferently, or have no particular relation to any, then there is no necessity, nor indeed possibility, of linking the one with the other in a special commission."—MILTON, *of the Reformation in England*.

of the State as highly conducive to the interests of Christianity—as a public sanction due to its Divine origin from a nation of Christians—and as expedient, in order to keep the form of religion ever before our eyes, if it be for no other end than to remind us of the reality. I esteem the Church of England, bating some defects of easy remedy, as an excellent model of an ecclesiastical establishment. I revere its first founders, as erudite scholars and liberal-minded Christians; and it is well known, that had the spirit of their times permitted, they would have entirely removed the remains of Popish hierarchy and superstition which still deface its constitution. I regard the liturgies and forms of this establishment, with very few exceptions, almost perfect patterns of piety and devotional taste, and eminently conducive to the purposes of that public adoration of the Deity which greatly tends to curb our passions and to excite our virtues. Let it, however, be always remembered, that forms and ceremonies have in themselves little intrinsic value; that they are but the means of good; and that the true estimate of the utility and tendency of ceremonies, as well as of opinions on speculative points, is only to be formed on a calculation of their aptitude to influence our practice. Whatever produces a beneficial effect in this way, is of the highest value—whatever prejudices or retards that object, ought to be abolished—and whatever is neutral in

these operations, may be justly viewed as indifferent, and a useless incumbrance. Would to God that Christians could be converted to the belief, that it is not the *variety* of opinion which occasions our lamentable civil dissensions, but the refusal of liberty to differ; *the mischief lies in our not choosing to allow ourselves to differ*. If this freedom were permitted in religion, as in all other questions which agitate the human mind, we should preserve the same ingenuousness and good will which we practise in differences on all other subjects of philosophy and science. Those who have done most for the interests of Christianity — who have best acted up to their principles — have ever been the most dispassionate and diffident critics. They have viewed the divisions of the Christian world with the regret which their results require of every benevolent mind; and, both by their public and private influence, they have done their utmost to promote conciliation and allay violence. Not an eminent writer, of any age or country, whose character and works have survived the ephemeral prejudices of his time, but strives to impress upon us the virtue of rational doubt and diffident impartiality in all discussions on speculative points of doctrine. On such subjects, the respect due to the opinions of the many wise and excellent men, who, with equal natural and acquired advantages, have differed so widely, and the warning conveyed by

their vain and indeterminate disputes, should induce some pause in the judgment. We may be confident and yet mistaken, zealous but unwelcome friends. Christians would generally be surprised, would they but give that attention to discover the agreement that exists between them in all the real elements of their common faith, which they waste in endeavouring to procure unanimity on dogmatic articles: and I really believe, that if all controversies about *belief* were abandoned, not the slightest detriment would result to the Christian church; but, on the contrary, a far more perfect obedience to those real evangelical rules of devotional faith and practice which were taught by Jesus Christ, and about the tendency and nature of which we are all agreed. Not that it can be rationally expected that the Christian world should ever be in all respects of one opinion and one creed. The principle of human society, and the nature of the human mind, the creature of circumstance and education, will prevent such a uniformity of opinion; and, perhaps, the interest of religion itself requires that these differences should to a certain extent exist. The springs of human action are not always of the purest origin; and without some of the excitement which these divisions create, religion might be in danger from apathy and neglect. The same Providence which blessed the human race with the Gospel revelation, could

have placed its minutest doctrines, history, and precepts, beyond the power of doubt: that it has not so vouchsafed, is evident; and it is as evident to my mind, that those doubts, and the discussions to which they have given rise, were permitted for important ends. Christianity was not to be propagated by the sword; and rational discussion, enlisting in its service the ardent faculties of the mind, has doubtless, under the dispensation of a wise Providence, been intended as an efficient means to its support and spread. In fact, the apostolic age itself, with all its superhuman aid, was not free from its internal disputes. Peter and Paul contended with zeal upon a most vital question; but the ultimate benefit was evident, in the increased energy it gave Christianity, by subdividing the labours of the first planters of its truths. So also the apostasies of the early churches served a similar end; and had it not been for the corruptions of the Corinthian and Gallatian churches, so lamented and boldly reprov'd by St. Paul, the present age would not have possessed the powerful evidence for the truth of Christianity which is deduced from his invaluable epistles. Thus all things work together for the best, and out of evil cometh good. So, in the present day, the sifting discriminating industry and nervous intellectual intrepidity of the heterodox dissenter, have originated the most laborious and inextinguishable investigations of the

external evidences of revelation. The cold and sceptical spirit too often accompanying speculative inquiry, is tempered by the taste, erudition, and watchfulness of the orthodox churchman. The one is prevented from starving religion, and the other from smothering it with over care. The democratical honesty of the non-conformist, always disposed to doubt and attack every thing old, is opposed to the subserviency of State divines, whose business it is to maintain whatever is established. The toy-shop of the Catholic has a set-off in the ice-house of the free-thinking dissenter, and the happy medium lies between them. Thus in the political world the dangers of a too ardent philanthropy are met and prevented by a scrupulous idolatry of every thing pleading the sanction of age — a most useful counterpoise, by which the rust of time is often removed, and yet the dangers of rap'd changes averted. It would be unwise to seek the abrogation of an indifferent law, before we have a better to superinduce in its stead; and it is folly to condemn the evils of any institutions, without balancing their accompanying good. But even if heresy and schism be the evils, “the plague, the pestilence, and famine,” which thus appear when hovering before the eyes of many a zealous churchman, constraint and insult will never eradicate them, or produce conviction. The experience of all ages shows the mistaken effect of violence and

persecution. “He is the true heretic who burns—not he who is burnt.” Creeds, articles, and catechisms, instead of making all mankind think alike, have had the very opposite tendency. It is high time for priestcraft, therefore, to adopt some other course; seeing that all its efforts cannot impede the march of the human mind, or prevent the use of that noble and distinctive prerogative of human nature—the *liberty of philosophising*. When I see these futile attempts to force all our thoughts down the state channel, I cannot help thinking of the Irishman’s exclamation in the burning faggot—“Ah, my honeys, men will never all see alike ’till their eyes are put out!”

A catholic spirit of religious liberty may subsist under infinite varieties of opinion, and without the least prejudice to the advancement of the true one. “It was a notable observation of a wise father,” says Lord Bacon, “and no less ingenuously confessed, that those which held and persuaded pressure of consciences, were commonly interested therein themselves for their own ends.” The same incomparable writer, every sentence of whose *Essays* contains a quarry of wisdom, relates that it is noted by another father, “Christ’s coat had indeed no seam, but the Church’s vesture was of divers colours: there may be varieties of colours in the vestures, but let there be no rent.”—“These human varieties of opinion,” says Milton, “are as necessary to

truth, as the storms of the material world to the purifying the atmosphere." And at that glorious day, when He shall come to judge the quick and the dead, "he shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection."

Professing, therefore, great veneration for the established Church, I must admit, as a consequence, that it ought to be upholden and maintained with dignity and effect. But I am one of those, as by this time it will be suspected, who consider the Church of England may well subsist, and be more firmly *established*, without any civil disabilities*

* Arguments without end have been adduced in proof of toleration. "Every man has an undoubted right to judge for himself in matters of religion; nor should any mark of infamy, or any civil penalty, be attached to the exercise of his right. Every man has a right to the common privileges of the society in which he lives; and, among these common privileges, a capacity in law for serving his sovereign and country is one of the most valuable, distinguishing a *legal capacity* of service from a *right* to an actual appointment, which depends upon the choice of his sovereign, or of his fellow-citizens; and this capacity of serving the State is a right of such high estimation, and of such transcendent value, that exclusion from it is deemed a proper punishment for some of the greatest crimes. Actions, and not opinions, political or religious, are the proper objects of human authority and cognizance. No man, who does not forfeit that *capacity* of serving his sovereign and country, which is his natural right, as well as the honour and emoluments that may happen to be connected with it, by overt acts, ought to be deprived of them; and disabilities that are not thus incurred are unjust penalties, implying both disgrace and privation. Punishment, without the previous proof of guilt, cannot be denied to be an injury; and injuries inflicted on account of religion are undoubtedly persecutions. The ends of civil society can never justify any abridgement of natural rights that

being inflicted on those who separate themselves from its communion—

“ To force our consciences that Christ made free,
And ride us with a classic hierarchy.”

I am of opinion that many of its articles of *belief* are by no means necessary, and, on the contrary, often hurtful to its constitution: and as I can concede infallibility to no set of men, I contend that the several circumstances of persons, time, and place, may require that variation should, from time to time, be made in its formularies and outward professions. These, Sir, were the principles of the very men who, at the *Reformation*, remoulded the worn-out shape of Catholic Christianity; and to impugn these principles, is to dig up the very foundations of our Church, and to destroy the materials which its founders left for its repair. And fatal will it be to the Church of England, as it has been to all former establishments, if pride and prejudice shall oppose that needful emendation which the circumstances of the times render not only politic but necessary. He is, indeed, a treacherous friend to the Church, who would throttle it in the gripe of custom. “ As those who first bring honour into their family, are commonly more worthy than

is not essential to these ends. The institutions of religion, and the ordinances of civil government, are distinct in their origin and their objects, in the sanctions that enforce them, and the mode in which they are administered.”

most that succeed; so the first precedent (if it be good) is seldom attained by imitation. Surely every medicine is an innovation, and he that will not apply new remedies, must expect new evils; for time is the greatest innovator; and if time of course alter things to the worse, and wisdom and counsel shall not alter them to the better, what shall be the end? All this is true, &c. if time stood still; which contrariwise moveth so round, that a froward retention of custom is as turbulent a thing as an innovation; and they that reverence too much old times, are but a scorn to the new. It were good, therefore, that men in their innovations would follow the example of time itself, which indeed innovateth greatly, but quietly, and by degrees scarce to be perceived; for otherwise whatsoever is new is unlooked for; and ever it mends some, and impairs others: and he that is holpen takes it for a fortune, and thanks the time; and he that is hurt for a wrong, and imputeth it to the author.”—Lord BACON *on Innovations*.

A salutary inspection and revision of the Establishment has been counselled by some of the most learned and upright Prelates. The rejection of their advice has been the notorious cause of the increase of dissent from its forms and doctrines, and of separation from its communion; first, on the ground of church government occasioned by this obstinate contempt of the first principles of the

Reformation ; and, subsequently, on the score of differences in opinion on doctrinal points, which has since crumbled Christianity into innumerable and infinitely divided atoms, and (in the vulgar language of a sceptical writer) has made the Christian doctrines “ spiritual make-baits, bareters, beautifeus, and incendiaries — and churches bear-gardens, where beasts are only the combatants.”

It is high time, therefore, that out of a regard to its own existence and *re-establishment*, the Church should consider what causes of dissent she can remedy without inconsistency, and what means she can now adopt to restore her to her pristine vigour and influence. That such a liberality is her true interest, cannot be denied. She has only to open her doors wide enough for the multitude to enter in, and to restore God to his empire over conscience. There is a natural bias in the youthful mind to follow the national road : young people care little for those bones of contention over which angry polemics snarl : the forms of the Church are far more popular and attractive than the frigidness of the Non-conformists' Chapel. To this end the Clergy must more immediately interest young people in the study of religion ; for the most lamentable ignorance of it exists in the middle and higher ranks of English society. It is a subject of which most “ accomplished” men are profoundly ignorant, and which they banish from all thought or conversation. The

fashion of professing religion by the proxy of a Clergyman's Sunday offices, must be assisted by a return to domestic and family devotion and to individual study of the Bible. Children must be less hampered with dictated and hieroglyphical descriptions, and taught to reason sooner and better than they are at present permitted: parents must gradually lay before them the interesting process of historical evidence, step by step, as they are prepared for it—must teach them early and frequently to reason for themselves, and to make further search for the certainty of what has been taught them.

“ But while Protestants, to avoid the due labour of understanding their own religion, are content to lodge it in the breast, or rather in the books of a Clergyman, and to take it thence by scraps and mammocks, as he dispenses it in his *Sunday's* dole; they will be always learning, and never knowing; always infants; always either his vassals, as lay-papists are to their Priests; or at odds with him, as reformed principles give them some light to be not wholly conformable; whence infinite disturbances in the State, as they do, must needs follow*.”

Without reference to any particular doctrinal opinions, I must beg leave to deprecate those dark

* MILTON's Considerations touching the likeliest Means to remove Hirelings out of the Church.

and almost dreadful representations of the Deity, which scare the juvenile heart from the elevating study of religion. It has been well observed, that nothing displeases angry polemics more than setting the great gate of Heaven too wide open ; an envious kind of pride, which thinks it more honourable to enter in with a few at a narrow wicket. If any one leads the way but themselves, some persons account it a smuggling of souls, and a violation of their embargo. Far be it from me to overturn that moral responsibility which is the key-stone of the Gospel, or to weaken the restraints of the sacred law ; but I consider these misrepresentations of our Divine *Parent* as striking at the root of all religion, and being beyond all others the most pregnant cause of unbelief. Fearful lest these remarks might be subject to misinterpretation, I shall express what I have further to say on this head in the eloquent words of Dr. Cudworth, whose “ orthodoxy ” few will doubt. “ Is God powerful to kill and to destroy, to damn and to torment, and is he not powerful to save ? Nay, it is the sweetest flowre in all the garland of his attributes, it is the richest diamond in his crown of glory, that he is *mighty to save* : and this is far more magnificent for him, then to be stiled *mighty to destroy*. For that, except it be in the way of justice, speaks no power at all, but mere impotency, for the root of all power is goodnesse. Or must

we say, lastly, that God indeed is able to rescue us out of the power of sinne and Satan when we sigh and grone towards him ; but yet sometimes to exercise his absolute authority, his uncontrolled dominion, he delights rather in plunging wretched souls down into infernal night, and everlasting darknesse? What shall we then make the God of the whole world? Nothing but a cruell and dreadful *Erynnis*, with curled fiery snakes about his head, and fire-brands in his hands, thus governing the world! Surely this will make us either secretly to think that there is no God at all in the world, if he must needs be such, or else to wish heartily there were none*.”

Let the Church review her articles, her creeds, and confessions of faith, which are, in many points, fetters on those within, and stumbling-blocks to those without. “ Most of all Churches do, like coy maids, lace their bodies so strait, that they bring on themselves a consumption ; and will have the gates of heaven only made for themselves ; they pull up the ladders from the reach of others, after they have by them scaled the walls of preferment themselves.”

In the foregoing observations, Sir, it has been my sole wish to communicate to the Church what I

* Sermon preached before the House of Commons, 1647.

esteem wholesome truths. Let her reform herself: and let her Ministers leave off calumniating the People, and join in the labour. "Such a review," says Bishop Stillingfleet, in his preface to the Unreasonableness of Separation, "made by wise and peaceable men, not given to wrath or disputating, may be so far from being a dishonour to this Church, that it might add to the glory of it*."

I am, Sir,

With the highest respect,

Your obedient Servant and Fellow-Christian,

CHRISTOPHILUS.

* When the day of Religious Freedom arrives, I trust that the pale of immunities will be extended wide enough to include *all* those who are at present beyond its limits; and do not be alarmed, Mr. Wilberforce, if I put in my plea even for the *Jews*. I am aware of the great apprehension entertained lest any thing should appear to aim at what is called "*defeating prophecy*:" but I contend that sacred prophecy itself affords us unquestionable grounds for confidence that even these outcasts would not eat up the Church of England, *until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*. Grant them their civil rights. You have a *Rich Child* of Israel for your "virtual" Chancellor of the Exchequer. Let him turn him to account—imitate Pharaoh's example, and make Joseph prime minister. Why should you doubt a grateful return of support to our venerable establishments. "M. N. Rothschild" and "Zachariah Levi" are detected putting their hands to a Hole and Corner Address, professing their zeal for the Christian Revelation, and pledging their support of the "policied alliance" between Church and State. "We declare it to be our firm and unalterable

purpose (they say) to maintain our holy religion in all its purity !” Let us not, therefore, fear the non-conformity of Judaism : but rather rejoice to hear so enlightened a friend of Civil and Religious Freedom as Lord Holland publicly express his wish that these extra-parochial wanderers might regain those civil rights which they possessed before the professors of Christianity got the better of them. If indeed the question be raised, Whether on a balance of accounts the Jews are not better entitled to this restoration to political privileges than Protestant Dissenters ? I should not fear advocating the cause of the former ; and would beg to refer you to “The Complaint of the Children of Israel, representing their Grievances under the Penal Laws ; and praying that, if the Tests are repealed, the *Jews* may have the benefit of this indulgence in common with all other subjects of England, by Solomon Abrabanel, 1736.” About the same time as this tract appeared, several others were published on the same subject ; and perhaps the reader will excuse me if I extend this note to a short statement of a few of their arguments. The Jews say to the Church of England—You have laid hold of the *promise* which was made to our father Abraham, and have taken the Kingdom of Heaven as your inheritance, through the children of Israel ; whilst you exclude the whole twelve tribes from every privilege of the society in which they live. You have converted *our moiety* of the Bible to your own use, and have utterly prohibited us from taking any advantage of the *New Testament*, which might satisfy us for our loss of the *Old*. You have violently seized upon Moses and Aaron, and the Ten Commandments, which were our natural property, and have placed them over your *Communion Tables* ; yet make this pretence of *Christian community* a reason for excluding us from all advantages as members of the Commonwealth : so that *our Law* and *our Prophets* can afford us no protection, though you have exalted them to your first places of worship. You have robbed us of our Priesthood, and (what flesh and blood is scarcely able to bear) you have taken from us our *Tythes* ; yet you have given us nothing in exchange but *taxes* for our goods, reprobation and damnation for our souls, if after the loss of our goods and gear Satan can be such a drivelling fool as to take us. For God’s sake, therefore, look upon us as a People whom you have injured, and to whom you are indebted. We are not in the case of *Dissenters*, who are said to have injured you : we never turned you out of your churches, we never set up your chapter lands to sale, nor pulled down your hierarchy ; but, on the contrary, it is to *us* that you owe your *mîtres* and your *revenue*, privileges, and pre-eminences. If any

one asks, whence you derive your *Priesthood*, you know in your consciences that Christ himself was a *Layman*; you fetch your pedigree from the house of Aaron, and make more profit to your order of the Five Books of Moses, than of all the Four Evangelists. As you are beholden to us for the most valuable of your emoluments, you owe the most useful of your *Politics* to our Institutions. You have learned from us that the *righteous are entitled to the whole earth*. We address this to all denominations of Christians. We lay not the debt to the charge of the *orthodox* only: and we acknowledge that the Dissenters have their due share of all the gifts and graces derived from us: we therefore adopt the same reasoning for both sides; and since all concur to purloin their most profitable *practical* doctrines from the Children of Israel, we charge all with ingratitude beyond example, in debarring the Jews from the enjoyment of their natural rights. We are not guilty of *innovations*, but are punished for adhering to our *old* forms. We are charged with too violent a passion for the *mammon of unrighteousness*; but we find the most sanctified Christians as little scrupulous of taking the *profit* of worldly lucre to themselves, as they are of throwing the scandal upon us. We get what we can, and keep what we get, not by any principle of religion, but of convenience; and this principle reigns in as full perfection amongst the saints at *Hackney*, as among the Children of Israel in Bury Street or Duke Place. We cannot but wonder at receiving uncivil usage from our brethren the Dissenters, who have laid themselves under so many obligations to us *Jews*, have turned us out of possession of all our ancient privileges, and allow us as little right in the *Old Testament*, as we pretend to have in the *New*. We say to them, you appropriate the Songs of Sion to yourselves, as if they were Hymns of your own composing: you have made prize of all the Psalms of David, as if he had not been a King of *Israel*; and all the *blessings* of the law, and all the *curses* of the prophets, are converted to your own use, as if the Israelites had no property in them. After this, it is marvellously strange that you will share with us none of your prospective emoluments, but would debar us of all the indulgences to which you yourselves lay claim. What pretence can there be, that, contrary to the whole spirit of the Constitution of the country in which we live, *we Jews*, of all other People, should have no share in enacting or executing the laws which we are bound to obey? Your Prime Minister consults us in his difficulties—we give him our advice—we lend him our money—and trust him with our property. Why will he not trust us in return? Why might not the land of Ca-

naam be as profitably represented in Parliament as the borough of *Old Sarum*? And why might not our *Synagogue* be represented, with as much safety to the State, and as little prejudice to the Church, as the Kirk of *Scotland*? Are you afraid we should monopolize all the boroughs, and swarm in St. Stephen's Chapel as we do in Capel Court? Mr. Canning, at your next annual speech on Parliamentary Reform to the Backbone Club of Liverpool, condescend to answer these Rabbinical queries! They will at any rate give some variety to the topics usually introduced.

About half a century since, the emancipation of the Jews from civil disabilities appeared probable; but an *alarm* was raised on the subject of their *naturalization*, founded on the great danger of what I have before alluded to, under the term "defeating prophecy." The opposition to their claims was ably supported by a small pamphlet, attributed to a Common Councilman of London, written with great *naïveté*, under a suitable text—" *These men, being Jews, do sorely trouble our city.*"

LETTER VI.

AS TO THE LIBERTY OF THE PRESS IN MATTERS OF RELIGION—THE CAUSES AND REMEDIES OF ITS ABUSE—ESPECIALLY CONSIDERED WITH RESPECT TO UNBELIEVERS.

To William Wilberforce, Esq.

“Take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. And now I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone : for if this counsel or this work (*the Christian Revelation*) be of men, it will come to nought : but if it be of GOD, ye cannot overthrow it : lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”—*Acts of the Apostles*, ch. v.

“And now the time in special is, by priviledge to write and speak what may help to the further discussing of matters in agitation. The temple of *Janus*, with his two controversial faces, might now not insignificantly be set open. And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so *Truth* be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple ; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter ? Her confuting is the best and surest suppressing. For who knows not that Truth is strong, next to the Almighty ? she needs no policies, nor stratagems, nor licensings, to make her victorious ; those are the shifts and the defences that error uses against her power.”

AREOPAGITICA, *a Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing*.—MILTON.

SIR,—I am now about to draw largely on your Christian courage as well as patience ; but, secure

in the entrenchments of argument and authority, I do not despair of your countenance of my views, and even of *your* alliance in furthering them. My previous Letters will have prepared your mind for the subject of this epistle; and, however the circumstances of the times may occasion some readers a little nervous trepidation, yet I am not hopeless of converting even the most timid, be he but a Christian, and one who resolves to conform his opinions and practice to the rules of the Gospel.

My position is, “*That the Christian religion distinctly disavows, and utterly disclaims the aid and protection of civil pains, penalties, and restraints of every kind and in every degree.*” But for the sake of a more perfect understanding, or rather to prevent misunderstanding, I shall make one preliminary exception: namely, of those cases where, under pretence of opposing revelation, sceptical controversy is made the medium of private slander or gross associations with vice: this must undoubtedly be considered a *civil* offence—*contra bonos mores*—over which the common law of the land has ample and deserved cognizance.

In the discussion of this important question, and in my remarks in the present Letter, I have reference only to the principle of religious freedom: I disclaim all political allusions to the prosecutions lately carried on by the crown, and the societies whose object it is to protect public morals: any

reference, therefore, to these local occurrences, rests with the reader, not with me. It is not here my purpose to inquire how far the “Age of Reason,” “Palmer’s Principles of Nature,” and “The Deist’s Magazine,” (the works lately prosecuted,) are within or without the exception above made from toleration of infidelity. I wish to cast no reflection on the juries of my fellow-countrymen who have convicted the publishers of these or other similar works: if any of these convictions have been contrary to the spirit and law of Christianity, I impugn not their verdict, or the motives of their decision; the fault lies with the law of their country, if indeed that which usually passes for law on the subject is correctly defined. This law, as it is expounded to them, they solemnly swear by the holy Scriptures impartially to administer between the King and the prisoner at the bar. I wish, however, to join issue on the *principle* of these prosecutions: I will meet Mr. Justice Bayley and the Attorney-General on their own chosen ground—I will encounter them with their own weapons—and if “*Christianity is the law of the land*,” I here take my position, and boldly tell them they have pronounced their own refutation. *Christianity* disowns the principle of their prosecutions, and teaches the very opposite doctrine. I will prove this by the experience to be deduced of the ill effects of persecution; I will prove it from the example and doctrine of *Christ*; from the

example and doctrine of the apostles and primitive Christians; and, lastly, I will show the anti-christianity and impolicy of these legal restraints from the opinions and writings of the most eminent dignitaries of the English Church, of men who, from their zealous and superior advancement of the evidences of revelation, must be allowed the best judges of what means are most conducive to the common end of all, viz. the highest cultivation and spread of its divine and important truths.

I enter upon this discussion as a Christian; and must again decline all contact with the state politicians who use revelation as an “*arcantum imperii*,” to oil the wheels of government, and hoodwink the understandings of the people. “No *experiments!*” is the language indeed of *politicians*, (for in some things *bigotry* and *politics* agree, as extremes run easily into one another, by their very endeavour to keep at distance,) because, according to the politician’s creed, religion being useful to the state, and yet not founded in truth, all *inquiries* tend not to confirm, but to unsettle this necessary support of civil government. *But can a man who believes religion to have come from God use this language*?*”

It cannot be necessary for me to launch into any metaphysical dissertation on the nature of the

* Bishop Warburton’s Remarks on Occasional Reflections, Part II. page 134.

human mind, or into any history of its progressive cultivation and enlargement; the space of the “Universal History” itself would not suffice for the importance of the subject: neither can any abstract reasoning on the Liberty of the Press be at all requisite in an era of civil and religious freedom cotemporary with *ERSKINE*; and while the memorable efforts of the “friends of the Liberty of the Press” still survive in the grateful recollections of the country.

Man, being intended for society, was created communicative. The gift of speech for some time gave vent to this natural disposition, and was adequate to its wants. As he multiplied and spread, this faculty became too confined for the purposes of social life, and signs were invented for a distant intercourse. These signs were a long time the imperfect representative and bare images of things. The inadequacy of hieroglyphical writing soon urged human ingenuity to the invention of the alphabet, and letters became the signs of words, thoughts, and things: thus was the invention of letters originally founded in and as a mere auxiliary to the use of speech; and from the want of additional facility in the use of letters proceeded the *Art of Printing*. To this never-ceasing fountain of knowledge and virtue must be ascribed the extraordinary progress of the world in the arts and sciences, in government, and religion; and though artful politicians and

bigoted priests may bemoan and oppose the progress of our intellectual emancipation from darkness and error, no artificial embankments of rubbish or political craft can stem the rolling and rapid current of improvement. To deny that there are many evils accompanying a state of half-knowledge in the People, would be weak in the extreme; but we must not forget to compare the hundredfold greater evils of utter ignorance with those of partial learning; and so far from prompting the abandonment of popular instruction, the temporary inconveniences attending its progress ought the more to stimulate our exertions in its acceleration. I cannot, however, better express myself, than in words of that magnificent sermon of Robert Hall, on the Advantages of Knowledge to the Lower Classes: "These are the likeliest, or rather the only expedients that can be adopted, for forming a sound and virtuous populace: and if there be any truth in the figure, by which society is compared to a pyramid, it is on them its stability chiefly depends; the elaborate ornament at the top will be a wretched compensation for the want of solidity in the lower parts of the structure. These are not the times in which it is safe for a nation to repose on the lap of ignorance. If there ever were a season when public tranquillity was ensured by the absence of knowledge, that season is past. The convulsed state of the world will not permit unthinking stupidity to

sleep, without being appalled by phantoms, and shaken by terrors, to which reason, which defines her objects and limits her apprehensions by the reality of things, is a stranger. Every thing in the condition of mankind announces the approach of some great crisis, for which nothing can prepare us but the diffusion of knowledge, probity, and the fear of the Lord. While the world is impelled, with such violence, in opposite directions; while a spirit of giddiness and revolt is shed upon the nations, and the seeds of mutation are so thickly sown, the improvement of the mass of the People will be our grand security, in the neglect of which the politeness, the refinement, and the knowledge accumulated in the higher orders, weak and unprotected, will be exposed to imminent danger, and perish like a garland in the grasp of popular fury. *Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation; the fear of the Lord is his treasure.*"

I never could conceive on what ground differences of opinion, as to a religion of which charity is the very essence, should form an exception to the toleration and liberty allowed mankind on all other subjects of inquiry and belief; or why it should originate such bitter and fatal resentments as the history of religious persecution exposes to our view. I never could discover on what rational ground a free and unlimited range for the human mind was

interdicted on the only subject which has been the object of a *revelation* from the Deity to man; and in a religion where the *Bible* is the magnetic needle and pole star of our course—a subject, too, of all others the most susceptible of the influences of prejudice and education*, of passion and feeling, and which on that very account calls for the most free and unrestricted liberty, as the vital air of its respiration. Surveying the animosities of Christian warfare and contention, one would be apt to suppose that the professors of Christianity were labouring the literal accomplishment of a text in scripture (Matt. x. 34.), “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.” Their dreadful prostitution of the name and character of our holy religion has certainly made good the prediction, that “whoso killeth you will think he doth God good service.” Surely the world must be well nigh convinced of the folly of allowing a magisterial prescription and patent in Christianity. Dear-bought experience has shown the utter incompetency of human tribunals, of judges, juries, and gaolers, in matters of religion. This right of the magistrate to force all men to religion would place himself on the funeral pile of his own principles, if

* “Whatever was the creed of their father, or tutor, that will be theirs from their infancy to their lives’ end. Ninety-nine in an hundred of those who are Christians, would probably have been Mahometans if they had been born in Turkey, and would have imbibed their religion, as they do their native tongue, along with their mother’s milk.”—*Dedication to Essay on Spirit by a late Bishop of Clogher.*

he chanced to visit a country where the state religion differed from his own: it is an equal justification of the Mahometan and the pagan sacrifices of the idolater: if an English magistrate may use the sword of state against one who disavows and impugns his religion, a Madagascar Chief has an equal title. Where is the definition of "heresy" and "blasphemy" to lie? This system would describe it by geographical boundaries. It is one of perpetual re-action; for the persecuted, as they get uppermost, have always revenged themselves on their persecutors. "Christians," says Archbishop Tillotson, "are commonly most hot and furious for that of which there is the least certainty." The streets of Hamburgh have been deluged with blood in a fanatical contest whether the Lord's Prayer should be said backwards or forwards. The carnage in the early contentions of the Eastern and Western Churches has been the argument against the tendency and spirit of the Gospel, whence many an unbeliever has fenced himself around—resisting all approach. The massacres of St. Bartholomew, the dreadful persecutions of the Vaudois, and of the peaceful inhabitants of the valleys of Piedmont*, the burnings of the Protestant by the Catholic—and vice

* It was on the cruel massacre of these truly evangelical Christians (1655) that Milton wrote that beautiful sonnet:

"Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd saints, whose bones
Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold;
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipp'd stocks and stones

versâ, mutatis mutandis—have fearfully shown us the truth of the apostolic warning*—"If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." The frequent raging of these cruel persecutions was but too truly described by an old writer, as that which "had brought Christians to a butchery one of another, and made a mere shambles of Christendom."

"Where art thou fled, fair Charity? sweet breath,
That stills the stormy soul! soft eye of peace!
That weep'st at all this mischief! seest man's pride
Mistaken for religion! whispering low
In the calm voice of universal love,
Soft as the tepid zephyr's downy wing;
The odorous breezes of thy balmy gale
Fly scatter'd wide in persecution's blast."

I shall now proceed to show that the most extended liberty, even to unbelievers, in the entertainment, publication, and defence of their opinions, is the only cure of these afflicting evils. It is not pretended that irreligious publications are in them-

"Forget not: in thy book record their groans,
Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese, that roll'd
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven. Their martyr'd blood and ashes sow
O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple Tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who, having learn'd thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe."—XVIII.

* Gal. v. 15.

selves perfectly harmless ; but, allowing them to do a certain quantity of mischief, our argument is, that on a *balance* of the evils resulting from the permission and forcible repression of the works of unbelievers, the preponderance is greatly against their repression : the principle which would justify repressing them may be brought to bear against revelation itself ; and the question is not, whether sceptical works make sceptics?—but, whether, from their free allowance and circulation, such an attention is not excited to the study and practice of Christianity, that the converts from indifference and ignorance of religious truth greatly outnumber those who unfortunately quit their hold of it? Here is the jet of the argument, so well expressed in the parable of the tares. Let them grow together till the harvest, for the reason assigned by our Saviour, who doubtless foresaw the evil of countenancing persecution, “lest the wheat be endangered by the extirpation of the tares.” The more useful and necessary the cultivation of any science becomes to the world, the more probable and dangerous is its perversion. Divinity, Law, and Physic, are notorious instances of this fact. And how is this perversion to be detected and remedied, if the Press is in the hands only of those who profit by it? They who earn truth by their own ardour and industry, are the most influenced by it ; and, on the contrary, those who

only inherit an opinion as they do their name, have the least knowledge of its worth. Were this constant alarm of the dangers of discussion permitted to palsy and suppress all opposition to our own individual sense of right, we should soon be immersed in barbarism and slavishness; and works of the highest moment would be strangled in their birth, lest, as a Bishop of Winchester said of the Essay on the Human Understanding, it *might* be applied to other uses than what the author designed!—a species of pains and penalties by *anticipation*, even worse than an *ex post facto* legislation. To oppose force to sound reasoning, is unjust; to answer false reasoning by force is impolitic as well as unjust. A bad cause is quickly refuted—a good cause readily defended. The technical distinctions regarding discussion and publication are not worth examination here: I shall proceed to show that Christianity, though it can safely endure persecution, can never exercise or warrant any without the violation of its spirit and design; and that the Christian name never was more scandalized than when prostituted to justify violence and blindness. It has been well observed, that punishment for opinion may be of *ecclesiastical*, but could never be of *Christian* pedigree. It affords the unbeliever his strongest argument; he can never be dislodged, if persecution is warranted by Christianity.—“You,”

he says, "challenge me to fight—you first tie my hands behind me, and then boast of the punishment you have given me: it is easy for those to win who bowl alone!" The learned Dr. Clagget, in his *Persuasive to an Ingenuous Trial*, writes: "They that have a good cause, will not fright men from considering what their adversaries say by their books, but rather encourage them so to do, that they may see the difference between truth and error, reason and falsehood, with their own eyes. This is the effect of a well-grounded confidence in truth. It is a bad sign when men are loath to have their opinions seen in the day, but love darkness more than light." The space of this Letter will not allow me room to trace the stunting system of licensing. The primitive councils were accustomed to mention any books they thought of dangerous tendency, and to recommend such as they esteemed deserving of notice. The council of Trent, as narrated by Father Paul, extended to the eye the priestly dominion which had been exercised over the judgment, in burning and prohibiting every thing which did not meet their taste and humour, "raking through the entrails of many a good old author, with a violation worse than any that could be offered to his tomb." Pope Martin V. was the first pontiff who by his bull excommunicated the reading of heretical books. The Church of Rome and the Spanish Inquisition,

afterwards engendering together, brought forth the well-known catalogues and indices expurgatorii. Milton, remonstrating against the importation of the system into England, writes : “ We have it not, that can be heard of, from any ancient state, polity, or church, nor any statute left us by our ancestors, elder or later ; nor from the modern custom of any reformed city or church abroad ; but from the most anti-christian council, and the most tyrannous inquisition that ever inquired. Till then books were ever as freely admitted into the world as any other birth ; the issue of the brain was no more stifled than the issue of the womb : no envious junto sate cross-legged over the nativity of any man’s intellectual offspring.”

Jeremy Taylor, in the preface to the *Liberty of Prophesying*, (first edition, 1647,) holds the same opinions with his great contemporary and political opponent : “ Thus farre I thought I had reason on my side, and I suppose I have made it good upon its proper grounds, in the pages following. But then if the result be, that men must be permitted in their opinions, and that Christians must not persecute Christians ; I have also as much reason to reprove all those oblique arts which are not direct persecutions of men’s persons, but they are indirect proceedings, ungentle and unchristian, servants of faction and interest, provocations to zeal and animosities, and destructive of learning and inge-

nuity. And these are suppressing all the monuments of their adversaries, forcing them to recant, and burning their books"—p. 34.

“ I am sure such things were never taught us by Christ and his apostles ; and if we were sure that ourselves spoke truth, or that truth were able to justify herself, it were better if to preserve a doctrine wee did not destroy a commandement, and out of zeale pretending to Christian religion, loose the glories and rewards of ingenuity and Christian simplicity.”—p. 35.

“ It is but an illiterate policy to think that such indirect and uningenuous proceedings can amongst wise and free men disgrace the authors, and disrepute their discourses ; and I have seen that the price hath been trebled upon a forbidden or a condemned book ; and some men in policy have got a prohibition that their impression might be the more certainly vendible, and the author himselfe thought considerable. The best way is to leave tricks and devices, and to fall upon that way which the best ages of the Church did use : with the strength of argument, and allegations of Scripture, and modesty of deportment, and meeknesse, and charity to the persons of men, they converted misbelievers, stopped the mouths of adversaries, asserted truth, and discountenanced error ; and those other stratagems and arts of support and maintenance to doctrines, were the issues of hereticall braines ; the

old Catholicks had nothing to secure themselves but ἐν μέγᾳ of truth and plaine dealing.”—p. 36.

“ In England, although the Pope had as great power here as any where, yet there were no executions for matters of opinion known till the time of Henry the Fourth, who (because he usurped the crown) was willing by all means to endear the Clergy by destroying their enemies, that so he might be sure of them to all his purposes. And indeed it may become them well enough who are wiser in their generations than the children of light, it may possibly serve the policies of evill persons ; but never the pure and chaste designs of Christianity, which admits no blood but Christ’s, and the imitating blood of martyrs, but knowes nothing how to serve her ends, by persecuting any of her erring children.”—p. 26.

“ Let all errorrs be as much and as zealously suppressed as may be, (the doctrine of the following discourse contradicts not that,) but let it be done by such meanes as are proper instruments of their suppression, by preaching and disputation (so that neither of them breed disturbance), by charity and sweetness, by holinesse of life, assiduity of exhortation, by the word of God and Prayer.”—p. 28.

The utter fruitlessness of attempts to suppress discussion was most signally manifested during the dominion of the licensing system in England, in the publication of some of the most standard works on

political liberty. It can only tend to make a wonder long-lived; and, as Lord Bacon writes, "the punishment of wits enhances their authority, and a forbidden writing is thought to be a certain spark of truth that flies up in the faces of them who seek to tread it out." Milton says it reminded him of the sagacious country gentleman, who thought by shutting his park gate to pound up the crows.

I shall now briefly enumerate the frequent occasions on which our Lord discountenanced persecution and force, and the aid of the secular power. It cannot be denied that love and charity are the spirit of the Christian dispensation, and that the passive virtues were those of all others the most earnestly cultivated by Jesus Christ. He appealed to the hearts and the understandings of his hearers: he submitted his doctrine to the test of their reason; and he said—"If I do not speak truth, do not believe me." "The works which I do bear witness of me." The four Gospels, containing the history of his doctrine and practice, may in vain be ransacked for the slightest justification of coercion, either as regards the inward or exterior profession of his religion. It was to the excellency of his doctrine, and to the spotless purity of his life, he alone appealed for support and popular influence. In the calling and selection of his earliest disciples he made use of no compulsion, not even the employment of miraculous

power: he did not drive them before him, but his words were, "Follow me." (Matt. iv. 19.) When he gave them their first commission, with supernatural power, to *preach* the Gospel, he said to them (c. x.), "Freely ye have received, freely give: provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses; nor scrip for your journey; neither shoes, nor yet staves. If a house be not worthy, let your peace return to you. Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, shake off the dust of your feet. Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye harmless as doves." In his counsel to them concerning the reproof of the wrong-doer, he says (c. xviii. v. 17.), "Tell it to the church, and if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican:" as Bishop Mann renders the meaning—"Let him be put out of the church, and his company avoided, as the Jews avoid that of a heathen and a Roman tax-gatherer." When the disciples, James and John, visited with him the village of the Samaritans, and indignantly witnessed its reluctance to receive their Lord and Master, they said (Luke, xix. 34.), "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them? *He* turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." In that beautiful

narrative of his discourse with the woman of Samaria at the well, our Saviour especially distinguishes the uselessness of external profession without an inward feeling of religion influencing the conduct. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John, iv. 24.) When many of his followers deserted him, and the disciples were seized with distrust and panic, he sought to detain them by no species of compulsion, but, appealing to his works, he said (c. xvi. v. 67.), "Will ye also go away?" When the Jews were obstinately incredulous, he publicly declared to them (c. xii. v. 47.), "If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not; for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." He again distinctly informs them their punishment would not be in this world, but in that to come: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the *last* day." (v. 48.) In that affecting conversation with the apostles, wherein he predicted his approaching sufferings, he prepared them for the opposition of the world, and gave them the most strengthening assurance that it would avail nothing against them: "Do ye now believe? These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace: in the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

(c. xvi. v. 33.)* In fact, there is but one solitary instance throughout the whole Gospel narrative that can countenance the application of force, viz. in our Saviour's expulsion from the Temple of the buyers and sellers who had profaned its most sacred recesses. Perhaps no passage in Scripture has more

* The famous text, Luke, xiv. 23, (the parable of the great supper, where the servant is instructed to "*compel* them to come in,") urged by the Romanists and others in support of religious persecution, is well known to have been perverted and wrested to an incongruous and absurd sense, to make it countenance and justify the offering of violence to the natural and religious rights of mankind. The word *αναγκασον* means nothing more than *persuade* or *prevail upon*, *persuade or prevail upon them to come in*, as is plain to a demonstration, not only from the context, but also from a numerous collection of texts in Dr. Clarke's admirable sermon, drawn both from the Old and New Testament, in which this same or some similar expression occurs. See, too, Le Clerc's excellent animadversions, and Grotius's, Whitby's, and Wolzogenius's Annotations ad loc.

Le Clerc and Wetstein have produced a passage from Horace, where *cogo* is manifestly used in the same sense as here in St. Luke:

" ————— Nam cum rogat, et prece cogit,
Scilicet ut tibi se laudare, et tradere coner, &c.

Epist. i. 9.

To which I can add another from Ovid :

" Cui dea, Duc, inquit ; scisti, qua *cogere* posses :
Seque levat saxo, subsequiturque senem."

Fast. IV. 527, 528.

Perpello, as is well known, has the same signification : "Adhoc, collegam suum Antonium pactione provinciæ perpulerat, ne contra rempublicam sentiret."—SALLUST. B. C. 27. edit. Wasse. "Jam inter hæc eminus petebatur ; quum testudine objecta milites, qui, ut inde discederet, *perpellenere* nequiverant, tuebantur."—CURT. V. iii. 9.

Compello has the same acceptation in the following passage of the last-mentioned author : "Alexander, cum et classem procul haberet, et longam obsidionem magno sibi ad cætera impedimento videret fore, caduceatores, qui ad pacem eos *compelleret*, misit."—IV. ii. 15.

. *Dissertation on Persecution*, by THOMAS EDWARDS, D.D. 1766.

difficulty in its exact application than this act of our Lord's, so apparently inconsistent with the whole tenour of his life and doctrine. But, to avoid the polemical controversy connected with its explanation, I shall not enter into its merits, satisfied that the evangelist could intend no sanction of the employment of religious persecution, contradicted by the whole context of his preceding narrative. If there ever were instances of apostasy calling for severity of punishment, it was in the frequent unfaithfulness of the apostles to the evident impressions of their senses in the miracles of our Lord; yet on no occasion did he resent it with force. On the contrary, he meekly satisfied the incredulity of Thomas, and afforded him sensible proof of his resurrection in an instance of most obdurate unbelief. And before I close these remarks on the anti-christianity of pains and penalties, I cannot forbear citing some incidents in the life of Peter. The rebuke of Jesus Christ to that zealous disciple, on his attacking the servant of the High Priest, is too well known to require any commentary: but there are some circumstances in the denial of Christ by Peter not commonly observed. If ever there was an instance of decided blasphemy and infidelity, it was on that memorable occasion—a denial of his Lord and Master, after the most miraculous proofs afforded of his super-human character, and after the most zealous professions of support. Our Lord had predicted the

consequences of his over-zeal : and when Peter had denied him in the hall of the High Priest, “ the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter ! and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him. And he went out, and wept bitterly.” (Luke, xxii. 61.) The remorse and fears of the unhappy apostle were doubtless of the most piercing agony. The persecutor would say, that his flagrant apostasy called for the most signal vengeance, both as a punishment, and a warning to others. Not so the principles of Christianity. And there is an incident in the account of the resurrection connected with this distressing scene, the most touching and unartificial coincidence in the whole internal evidence of Scripture. Early in the morning, when the women visited the sepulchre, the first appearance of our Lord’s resurrection addressed them—“ Be not affrighted : ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified ; he is risen, he is not here. But go your way ; tell his disciples, *and* PETER, that he goeth before you into Galilee : there ye shall see him.” (Mark, xvi. 6.) The mixture of sublime generosity and deep knowledge of human character discernible in this affecting anecdote is most truly striking. Our Lord doubtless foresaw, in this former conduct of his fallen disciple, a debasing consciousness of self-degradation that would have banished Peter from his presence. Peter “ came running to the

sepulchre," oppressed with grateful contrition. The fourth evangelist continues the same undesigned and beautiful consistency in the narrative of a subsequent appearance to the apostles, in the repetition of that searching question, "Simon Peter, lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus said unto him, Feed my sheep!"—(John, xxi. 17.) I have quoted this artless and inimitable story, from its unanswerable support of my position. Peter was restored to the bosom of the church. This was the disciple who afterwards, by his zealous and apostolic exertions, made such ample atonement for his former errors, and so full a return for the generous forgiveness of his divine Master—the same disciple who counsels the Asiatic Gentiles, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly." (1 Peter, v. 2.)

Thus, Sir, have I incontestably proved the example of Christ opposed to persecution: his doctrine, as taught in that divine sermon on the Mount, was, "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again; and as ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father

also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged ; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned ; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." (Luke, vi.) Christ repeatedly reminded his disciples, " Ye are witnesses of these things ;" and his last parting injunction was, " Go ye into all the world, and *preach* the Gospel to every creature." Who is therefore guilty of blasphemous calumny, in imputing force to the permission of the Gospel ? If its sanction is there to be discovered, a greater mass of hypocrisy than the New Testament never was put together. In an old tract against the presentments of a Middlesex Grand Jury a century since, are some most apposite remarks. It says : " To suppose the practice of punishing men for not professing the Christian religion, or for professing the contrary, to be pleasing in the eyes of our Saviour, we must suppose him to have spoke thus to his apostles :—' Go ye and teach all nations : preach up the duties which I have commanded you, and which you have seen me practise, meekness, charity, and mutual forbearance of one another. And to convince men the better, lo ! I give you the power of working miracles, whereby the divinity of your mission may be evident to the senses, as well as reason of mankind. Behold, I send you forth as sheep among wolves : Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But mark me : I would not have you keep to this behaviour too

long. What I direct now is only for twenty, or thirty, or a hundred, or two hundred years, according as you succeed in bringing over the powers of the world to your side ; as soon as that is done, you must be quite other sort of men. Don't suffer any body to say a word against my religion : or if he do, and offer to bring never so plausible reasons for his infidelity, take care he be dispatched, or soundly chastised some way or other—by sword or famine, poison or presentment.' ”

Thus I have contrasted the life and doctrines of our Saviour with the conduct of modern Christians. It cannot be necessary to enter at any length into the subsequent practice of the apostles, since it cannot be doubted, by Christians, that they strictly followed the precepts of their divine Teacher. Throughout the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, they are represented as courting the most *public* examination of their opinions and testimony, and they every where addressed themselves to the understandings of their hearers. Indeed, an hierarchical principle of obedience to state religion would have come ill from those who appealed to the natural right of propagating truth, and who publicly sought to overturn the religious establishments of the whole world. As St. Paul accounts *charity* the very corner-stone of Christianity, so, on the other hand, he rates persecution

as the vilest crime ; and it was for the commission of this offence he describes himself (1 Tim. i. 15.) the “ chief of sinners.” When brought before the kings of the earth to answer for his “ seditious and blasphemous” attempts against their native gods, does he not on all occasions plead the liberty of human nature ? In his apostolic character, although frequently called upon to reprove the additions and subtractions made to Christianity by the heathen superstitions and mistaken zeal of the primitive converts, he no where enjoins pains or penalties, but, in the utmost severity of indignant anger, he counsels them to expel all the obdurate (after repeated exhortations) from the communion of the church ; he enjoins them not to *associate* with blasphemers and evil-doers, but their judgment and punishment he always concedes to the tribunal of the last day. “ Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and respect.” (1 Pet. iii. 15.) But the Scripture no where says, When the unbeliever states to you his doubts and objections, destroy his books and imprison his body : no ; Christianity distinctly declares, “ The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.” (2 Cor. x. 4.) The apostolic church was a spiritual militia of volunteers, not of pressed men ; and it was a noted saying of St. Ambrose, “ Fides voluntatis est, non necessitatis.” But two instances

only can be cited having the least countenance of persecution—the awful visitations on Ananias and Sapphira by Peter, and the punishment of Elymas the sorcerer, struck blind by Paul. Their entire irrelevancy, however, to the argument, is known by every critical reader, and may be seen in Chandler's *Introduction to Limborch*, and Bishop Barlow's *Treatise on Toleration*. They were miraculous incidents under peculiar circumstances; and, if the narratives are attentively read, will be seen to originate more in the immediate act of the Deity than with the apostles. The first planters of Christianity resided and lived with Pagan idolaters; the Epistles are filled with exhortations to gain them over to the faith by Christian conversation; and it would puzzle the persecutor to explain how converts were originally made, if the primitive believers were interdicted the society of Jews and Pagans.

I am aware of the arguments drawn from the Old Testament in favour of coercion by the civil magistrate; but he who cannot discover the total opposition of the two covenants in the inspired writings themselves, never will be convinced by me. I shall not, therefore, enter on an endless desert of controversy. The books of the Old Testament are of various and partial authority—some historical, others prophetic. The Jewish religion was a mixture of human and Divine law: Christ declares

his kingdom not of this world. The great object of the Jewish law appears to have been directed to the preservation of one nation in the belief and worship of one God, and, by a series of periodical revelations, finally to lay there the foundation of the Christian religion; from whence, as from a centre, might afterwards radiate, in proportion to the increasing maturity of human reason, the same light and knowledge throughout the whole earth. To this great end, much ceremonial and ritual form was necessary in the early ages of the world, when the human understanding was only impressible through a sensible medium. But as mankind emerged from ignorance and barbarism, and the effulgent light of the Christian revelation spread itself far and wide, these forms and ceremonies became useless burthens, and were superseded by the Gospel liberty. St. Paul, in explaining this gradual maturity and completion of the scheme of Providence, exhorts his fellow Christians—“Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and be not again the slaves of bondage.” True it is, that our Saviour declared to the Scribes and Pharisees, that he came not to destroy the *law*, but to support the law: this explains nothing, till some definition is attained of the meaning of the law alluded to. The Jewish theocracy was a mixture of the *political*, the *ceremonial*, and the *moral* law. It cannot

be contended that our Saviour, who predicted the present dispersion of the Jews—that standing miracle of Christianity—ever meditated the continuance of their *political* power; or that, in the prophecy of the total destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, when he wept over the prophetic anticipation of his country's ruin, he ever contemplated the perpetuity of the *ceremonial* law: there remains, therefore, only one choice of this threefold mixture—the MORAL law. The analogy of natural and revealed religion is the grand basis of our belief; and is the argument so ably managed by the great Bishop Butler. The authority of the commandments, recognised in the New Testament, is acknowledged, not as *civil*, but as *moral* law. The great author of revelation is equally the author of natural religion; and reason is itself described in the sacred writings as the “inspiration of the Lord, which giveth us understanding.” In this light, the Gospel system assumes and incorporates with itself every precept of the Mosaic law, which is declared of universal and perpetual obligation. When the mission of the Messiah was accomplished, “the sceptre departed from Judah.” For the violation of the *moral* law alone are we amenable to *human* tribunals; our faith and motives are the subjects of future jurisdiction. The practice of the moral law is alone necessary to the civil character, and its violations only ought to be

the ground of civil disabilities and punishments. Will our clerical tutors and professors teach us the love of our country and of truth from the classic examples of Greece and Rome, and yet deny that an unbeliever can be a good man, or a trust-worthy citizen? If they would so convince us, let them prosecute the works of Cornelius Nepos and Plutarch—let them burn the *Morals* of Plato, Seneca, and Marcus Antoninus—and interdict the books of Euclid, because they do not come through the medium of revelation. Miserable and devastating bigotry, which would make man a mere cultivated ape, and the restraints of the dog-kennel his only safe abode! I shall close this argument, drawn from scripture, with an extract from Bishop Barlow's tract on Toleration, 1692 :—" We find no *warrant* for it in the Gospel ; there is neither any *precept* or *practice* of our Saviour, or his apostles, to compel any to be Christians. The means they used, either to convert Pagans, or continue and confirm Christians, were constant preaching and a rational pressing that truth to others, which they had received from God, and believed themselves ; a prudent and meek disputing, and reasoning men out of their errors, a pious life, and patient suffering for the truth they preached : *verbo et exemplo agebant, non gladio* ; it was their Christian patience, not any coactive violence, which converted the world ; it was dying themselves, not killing others,

which planted and propagated the Gospel : *sanguis martyrum semen ecclesiæ* ; it was the blood of the *martyrs*, not of murdered heretics, which made the field of the church so fruitful : and by what authority we should do that now which they thought not fit to do then, I know not. Certainly, as they best knew what means were most proportionable and congruous both for the plantation and propagation of the Gospel, so we have reason to believe that those *mediums* they made use of were such ; and, on the other side, we may rationally conclude, that had there been any other means as congruous and conducive to the end they aimed at, as those they used, they would not have omitted them. Seeing, then, neither Christ nor his apostles ever commanded, or (by their example or practice) commended violence, or any coercive means to make or confirm Christians, we have great reason to believe that they conceived such means not congruous ; and if so, why should any think otherwise ?” I cannot refrain from here noticing the sad effects of a bigotry which restricts the investigation of many authors, from whom the youthful reader would gain the most virtuous impressions. The writings of Lord Shaftesbury, Lord Herbert, Bolingbroke, of Hume, and many modern unbelievers, contain inestimable dissertations on morals and the human mind ; but such is the timorous prescription of parents and tutors, that the index’ expurgatorius of mental

cowardice prohibits the use of what made some atonement for their infidelity. What is the consequence? The youthful mind, when it escapes the thralldom of tutorage, instantly seeks this forbidden fruit; and, totally unprepared for the snares of sophism, too often falls an easy sacrifice. This is notoriously true; and the literary character knows that "blasphemy and infidelity" are too often discoverable where genius and talent reside. But were we educated with more mental confidence of inquiry, the reverse would be the case; for Christians cannot pass such a sentence on their religion, as to say that examination makes unbelievers: half-knowledge, dogmatism, conceit, and the first excursions of a speculative mind, may travel out of the road; but the most powerful attestation of the truth of revelation is the recorded faith of the talent, the genius, and the taste of Bacon, Newton, Boyle, Locke, and Milton, whose preponderance of intellect and accomplishment is, to such men as Hume, Gibbon, Rousseau, Voltaire, and Frederick "the Great," "as the small dust of the balance against the mountains, the faint glimmerings of a taper to the effulgence of a mid-day sun!" We live in an age of the most sifting and wide-spreading inquiry: Christianity, in common with all other subjects of human knowledge, must be submitted to the ordeal. The first miraculous promulgation of the Gospel, *per se*, converted the primitive believers; but the age of miracles having

ceased, and no sane believer of the present day pretending to super-human apprehension, demonstrative evidence is no longer attainable: moral conviction is the extent of our faith, derived from the writings and traditions of eye-witnesses, and the internal evidence of the writings themselves. Indeed, the strongest arguments have been used to show the wisdom of this limited quantum of proof—that it ensures an investigation and influence of religion which would not be bestowed on it if sensible demonstration was afforded of its truth. Archbishop Tillotson well observes, if our religion is too good to be examined, it is too bad to be believed; and Bishop Burnet expresses the same sentiments: “Indeed, it reflects great dishonour on any ancient system of things, whether religious or civil, or philosophical, if they will not bear a strict and free examination; and whatever fools, bigots, or hypocrites may say or pretend, it is in the highest degree scandalous, and prejudicial to true religion and the interest of society, to prevent or even discourage such examination; and persecution for so bad a purpose, is destructive of that liberty which all mankind are entitled to, and consequently a crime of the most malignant nature.”—*Arch. Philoso. Dedication to King WILLIAM.*

The limits of a pamphlet will not embrace the opinions of the Christian fathers in favour of religious liberty: but the reader will find them in

Limborch's History of the Inquisition. This is not an age in which the fathers command much authority; but the most learned and enlightened among them include the unbeliever within the boundaries of liberty: and neither in Origen nor Eusebius can be discovered any demand of inagisterial help. Chillingworth, that powerful pioneer of Protestantism, says, "I have learned from the ancient fathers of the Church, that nothing is more against religion than to force religion."

I have, Sir, extended this Letter to considerable length, and have not been sparing of numerous quotations; but the vital importance of the subject needs no excuse: and conscious of the strong prejudices of the religious world against this free permission of scepticism, I have rather reasoned the question from the arguments of others than obtruded my own individual views. I shall now proceed to show, that so far from this permission being a latitudinarian opinion and innovation, it is the firm and avowed opinion of the greatest ornaments of the English Church, and the truest friends of revelation. I have made one exception to this liberty, which I may be called upon more particularly to define: I cannot, however, perceive the necessity of such definition. The latitude of sceptical liberty, in my humble view, may be very extended without the slightest danger: and it should not be forgotten, that the unbeliever cannot but

view the pretensions of our Saviour as the most arrant imposture: indeed this is the alternative we urge him to. If he uses reviling instead of argument, it appears to me he is the less dangerous.

Dr. Lardner, the great champion of Christianity, in some letters which passed between himself and several of the Bishops on the prosecution of Woolston, remarks, that the proper punishment of a low and scurrilous style of writing is neglect, contempt, scorn, and general indignation. I have myself heard from a modern pulpit the same dignified opinion:—"Let these base slanderers alone. The exalted and glorious character of our great Master and Lord, so artlessly, so beautifully delineated by the sacred historians, can suffer nothing from the rude and coarse attacks of vulgar and unprincipled scribblers. Polished and well educated unbelievers have uniformly borne testimony to its superior excellence. And with regard to the rest, it is better to leave them alone to perish in their own native slime and filth, than by making them the objects of legal animadversion to raise them to distinction, and to give a momentary currency to their infamous scurrility. Our Lord himself never condescended to defend his own character; but confidently appealed to the whole tenour of his conduct, and boldly challenges his most malignant enemies. 'Which of you convinces me of sin?'

He has left an example. Let his disciples follow his steps. The rays of the sun cannot be polluted by the filthiest ordure."

Bishop Lowth, in his celebrated Visitation Sermon, has the following splendid passage on this subject: "Christianity itself was published to the world in the most enlightened age; it invited and challenged the examination of the ablest judges, and stood the test of the severest scrutiny: the more it is brought to the light, to the greater advantage will it appear. When, on the other hand, the dark ages of barbarism came on, as every art and science was almost extinguished, so was Christianity in proportion oppressed and overwhelmed by error and superstition: and they that pretended to defend it from the assaults of its enemies, by prohibiting examination and free inquiry, took the surest method of cutting off all hopes of its recovery. Again, when letters revived, and reason regained her liberty; when a spirit of inquiry began to prevail, and was kept up and promoted by a happy invention, by which the communication of knowledge was wonderfully facilitated; Christianity immediately emerged out of darkness, and was in a manner republished to the world in its native simplicity. It hath always flourished or decayed together with learning and liberty: it will ever stand or fall with them. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to the cause of true religion, that it be submitted to an open and impartial examination; that every disquisition con-

cerning it be allowed its free course ; that even the malice of its enemies should have its full scope, and try its utmost strength of argument against it. Let no man be alarmed at the attempts of Atheists or Infidels : let them produce their cause : let them bring forth their strong reasons, to their own confusion : afford them not the advantage of restraint—the only advantage which their cause admits off : let them not boast the false credit of supposed arguments and pretended demonstrations which they are forced to suppress. What has been the consequence of all that licentious contradiction with which the Gospel hath been received in these our times and in this nation ? Hath it not given birth to such irrefragable apologies and convincing illustrations of our most holy religion, as no other age or nation ever produced ? What in particular hath been the effect of unrestrained opposition in a very recent instance, prepared with much labour and study, and supported with all the art and eloquence of a late celebrated genius ? Hath not the very weakness and impotence of the assault given the most signal and decisive victory to the cause of truth ? And do not the arms of this mighty champion* of infidelity stand as a trophy erected by himself to display and to perpetuate the triumph ?”

Dr. Campbell, in his admirable refutation of Hume, every where inculcates the same noble opinion ; but one passage, although so well known

* Lord Bolingbroke.

for its nervous eloquence, I cannot refrain from quoting:—"So far, therefore, am I from being afraid of exposing Christianity by submitting it to the test of reason; so far am I from judging this a trial which it is by no means fitted to endure, that I think, on the contrary, the most violent attacks that have been made upon the faith of Jesus, have been of service to it. Yes: I do not hesitate to affirm that our religion hath been indebted to the *attempts*, though not to the *intentions* of its bitterest enemies. They have tried its strength indeed, and by trying they have displayed its strength; and that in so clear a light, as we could never have hoped, without such a trial to have viewed it in. Let them therefore write, let them argue, and when arguments fail, even let them cavil against religion as much as they please: I should be heartily sorry, that ever in this island, the asylum of liberty, where the spirit of Christianity is better understood (however defective the inhabitants are in observance of its precepts) than in any other part of the Christian world; I should, I say, be sorry that in this island, so great a disservice were done to religion, as to check its adversaries in any other way than by returning a candid answer to their objections. I must at the same time acknowledge, that I am both ashamed and grieved, when I observe any friends of religion betray so great a diffidence in the goodness of their cause, (for to this diffidence

it can only be imputed,) as to show an inclination for recurring to more forcible methods. The assaults of infidels, I may venture to prophesy, will never overturn our religion. They will prove not more hurtful to the Christian system, if it is allowed to *compare small things with greatest*, than the boisterous winds are said to prove to the sturdy oak. They shake it impetuously for a time, and loudly threaten its subversion; whilst, in effect, they only serve to make it strike its roots the deeper, and stand the firmer ever after.”—3d edition, p. 233.

The late Bishop Watson writes:—“God forbid that the search after truth should be discouraged for fear of its consequences. The consequences of truth may be subversive of systems of superstition, but they never can be injurious to the rights or well-founded expectations of the human race.”

He declares to Mr. Gibbon:—“It would give me much uneasiness to be reputed as an enemy to free inquiry into religious matters, or as capable of being animated into any degree of personal malevolence against those who differ from me in opinion. On the contrary, I look upon the right of private judgment, in every concern respecting God and ourselves, as *superior to the controul of human authority*; and have ever regarded free disquisition as the best means of illustrating the

doctrine, and establishing the truth, of Christianity. Let the followers of Mahomet, and the zealots of the Church of Rome, support their several religious systems by damping every effort of the human intellect to pry into the foundations of their faith; but never can it become a Christian to be afraid of being asked a reason of the faith that is in him; nor a protestant to be studious of enveloping his religion in mystery and ignorance."

To Mr. Paine, in his *Apology for the Bible*, he makes this honest and manly confession:—"If you have made the best examination you can, and yet reject revealed religion as an imposture, I pray God may pardon what I esteem your error. And whether you have made this examination or not, does not become me, or any man, to determine."

I might endlessly multiply these authorities; but though I might add to their number, I could not add to their weight. I have omitted altogether many admirable arguments by the protestant dissenters, because they are somewhat interested parties, and I was resolved to abide by the established church. One sentence only I shall extract from a private letter of Dr. Lardner to Dr. Waddington, bishop of Chichester:—"Your lordship freely declares, that Mr. Woolston ought not to be punished for being an infidel, *nor for writing at all against the Christian religion*, which appears to be a noble declaration. If the governors of

the church and civil magistrates had all along acted up to this principle, I think the Christian religion had been before now well nigh universal."

There remains one other argument, from which it seems impossible to escape. Bishop Berkeley, Dr. Benson, and many of the ablest advocates of Christianity, have written *dialogues*, in which they introduce an unbeliever with every possible objection (as they say) it is possible to invent. Now, why not permit the sceptic to do this for himself? Indeed, it appears the only mode of remedying what divines pretend is the greatest loss ever sustained by Christianity, viz. the destruction of the books of the early opponents of revelation. Berkeley, Paley, Lardner, and all our first biblical writers, express their regret for this loss.

Bishop Loyd says:—"Though some of our Deists complain of the loss of Porphyry's books against the Christian religion, yet they may be assured, for their comfort, they will not want the help of our learned men to bring them to light. We want them, indeed, on many accounts; but especially to shew them, that, as they have Porphyry's malice, so, if they had his great learning too, both these joined together would not hurt the Christian religion. As for his arguments, it cannot be imagined that there was any thing of strength in them, more than what Julian the Apostate took into the work that he writ afterwards on

that subject. And to our comfort, as well as the Deists', that work is not lost."—LOYD'S *Chron. Account of Pythagoras, &c.* p. 21.

Grotius, in a letter to Peireski, says: "I send you, most noble sir, some passages taken out of the writings of Porphyry by the defenders of the Christian religion, from whence you may easily see how many things might have been produced out of his books for the purpose of Christianity, if we had them entire; those books especially which he wrote against the Christians, wherein he put many weapons into our hands that might be employed against himself and the Pagans. As to the poison contained in those books, sufficient antidotes were to be had out of many apologetic writings of the ancient Christians, and especially out of the books of Origen against Celsus, and of Cyril against Julian. Wherefore I should esteem it a public benefit to have those books in the hands of such men who are willing and able to use them."—GROTII *Epist.* p. 197. ep. 509.

"It were much to be desired that we had the books which Porphyry wrote against the Christian religion."—*Scaligerana Art. Porphyrius.*

Le Clerc says, that "the thirty books of Eusebius against Porphyry are the greatest loss that could be in respect to the works of Eusebius; for by them we might have learnt the objections of the ablest philosopher of his time against the Christian

religion, and the answer of the most learned bishop of his age.”—LE CLERC, *Bib. Univ.* tom. x. p. 494.

Even modern infidelity is allowed to have its accompanying good. “We must not, however, forget, that unbelievers of every class have their place in the great system as well as the apostles, though we may be thankful that we are not of the number. Of plants and animals, there are the seemingly mean and noxious, as well as the more noble and useful. A philosopher will not hate or despise any thing, but study the nature and the uses of every thing, and endeavour to derive advantage from every thing; believing that nothing was made in vain, and that a wise and benevolent Providence directs and overrules all events.”—*Observations on the Increase of Infidelity. Philadelphia, 1797.*

I recollect to have met, in some living writer, with an observation, that “the writings of the infidel will not unfrequently be found to do more service than injury to the Christian cause. The frequent assault of the citadel keeps the garrison awake. The attacks of the infidel call forth the energies of the faithful: they excite arguments to strengthen the weak, or to confirm the wavering, which might otherwise never have appeared.”

The deplorable scepticism increasing on the Continent, and more especially in the popish

countries, is universally acknowledged. I believe the absence of religious liberty to be the great and only cause. Whiston mentions an almost prophetic anticipation of it by Newton :—" Sir Isaac Newton had a very sagacious conjecture, which he told Dr. Clarke, from whom I received it, that the overbearing tyranny and persecuting power of the antichristian party, which had so long corrupted Christianity and enslaved the Christian world, must be put a stop to, and broken to pieces by the prevalence of infidelity, for some time before primitive Christianity could be restored ; which seems to be the very means that is now working in Europe for the same good and great end of Providence. Possibly he might think no other way so likely to do it in human affairs ; it being, I acknowledge, too sadly evident, that there is not at present religion enough in Christendom to put a stop to such antichristian tyranny and persecution, upon any genuine principle of Christianity."

I think I have now proved the right of the unbeliever to the freedom of the Press, and the entire accordance of that right with the interests of Christianity : I have shown this from the writings of Christians themselves, without the aid of one solitary argument from sceptics. I must again remind the reader, that I am far from denying the existence of evils in that liberty : my argument is, that the good

overbalances the evil. I contend that Christianity has suffered far more from the cruel persecution originating in the supposed right of the State to interfere with "heresies and blasphemies," and that no human tribunal can be equal to the legislation of what is the subject of Divine judgments. Mahometanism, the doctrines of Confucius, the wooden idols of Hindostan, are the "law of the land" in their respective countries; and on what principle can we send out missionaries to convert these deluded victims of priestcraft to overturn state religions founded on our principles? Dr. Furneaux observes, (Letters, &c. p. 73, note,) "that laws for the punishment of blasphemy may be easily turned to the destruction of all religious liberty: for what is blasphemy, in the general sense of the term, but uttering something dishonourable or injurious to the Divine Being? And what controverted religious sentiment is there, which under this general notion, by a court and jury of bigots, may not be condemned as blasphemy? The Athanasian styles the Arian a blasphemer, the Arian the Athanasian, the Calvinist the Arminian, the Arminian the Calvinist; and thus the same laws, differently applied as different parties prevail, will prove fatal to the religious liberty of all of them in their turn."

This necessary toleration of evil for the sake of good, particularly as relates to scepticism, was never

better stated than by Milton :—" Good and evil, we know, in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably : and the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discerned, that those confused seeds which were imposed on Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixed. As therefore the state of man now is ; what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear, without the knowledge of evil ? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true wayfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat."

It is scarcely credible how any *Christian*, bearing in mind the spirit which elevated our blessed Saviour on the cross amidst the scoffs and reviling of the Scribes and Pharisees, can be the advocate of religious persecution. The same barbarian bigotry inflicted the stripes and imprisonment on Paul and Peter, and sacrificed so many victims on the smoking altar of persecution. This same principle would tend to pound up and per-

petuate every enormity and every error which could plead the sanction of age. The occasional mistakes of persecutors have been acknowledged by themselves, and inquisitors have pleaded the ample remuneration for the loss of life in the posthumous fame of martyrdom; but I think it fair the martyr should have the refusal of his living reputation; and might ask the question, with Sir Richard Steele, in the *Christian Hero*, “What was it to Cæsar to be voted a god in the place where he ceased to be a man?”

Sir, I plead for that Christian liberty wherewith *Christ* hath made us free. It was on that rock of liberty that the ark of the reformation, tossed on the foaming billows of persecution, at last rested in glorious triumph: it is from that rock of liberty that the banners of Christianity will wave over the whole world. You may say that all mankind are not philosophers: I think I have shown that the *Common People* were the earliest and latest friends of revelation. You cannot doubt the prescience of the Almighty; and seeing that he made no provision for the civil punishment of “blasphemy,” you cannot doubt his intention of reserving it for his own cognizance. “Gather not up the tares, therefore, lest ye root up also the wheat with them: let them both grow together till the harvest.” In the language of the Roman historian, “*Deorum injuriæ Diis curæ*”—“leave to the Gods the revenge of their

own wrongs." It was the saying of a sound and orthodox bishop of the English Church—"Fire and faggot may consume, but cannot refute; may make men coals and cinders, but cannot make them Christians; imprisonment and fetters may give them secular punishment, but not Christian contrition." The paper bullets of "blasphemy" can never, Mr. Wilberforce, destroy revelation: and I might apply to revelation that poetical simile on the abuse and persecution of an expatriated Englishman—Truth will ever rise superior to falsehood. The vapours which gather round the rising sun, and follow it in its course, seldom fail at the close of it to form a magnificent theatre for its reception, and to invest with variegated tints and with a softened effulgence the luminary which they cannot hide.

Thus, Sir, I have advocated, from reason, from the example and precepts of Christ, and from the authority of his most true and zealous followers, the most unrestricted Liberty of the Press: and I trust that if the *State* should think it necessary again to prosecute the wretched venders of irreligion, the prosecution will be carried on not in the name of his Most Sacred Majesty, the Defender of the Faith; but from the *War-Office* of his Royal Highness the Duke of York, Commander-in-Chief, *Bishop of Osnaburg!*

Believe me, Sir, I have addressed these Letters to you in the truest spirit of independence and

charity. I am not, Sir, the standard-bearer of this or that political Party; although I recognize the value and necessity of the association of bodies of men pursuing the same end in furtherance of their common cause; and detest a senseless outcry against *party*, and its accompanying vilification of every public character who varies from our own individual standard of right, or who is charged with the most corrupt motives for one act of inconsistency. I view the association of religious and political bodies of men as the principle of gravitation in human society—the atmosphere in which the planet of human nature revolves. But, at the same time, I abhor that satellite system which can separate on no occasion from the main body, but holds it necessary to go “through thick and thin,” and takes for its model of perfection the vane of a weathercock, in its perpetual subserviency to the wind that blows.

I address you, Sir, and the Religious Public, neither as a Tory, a Whig, nor yet as a Radical; esteeming these nicknames as bigoted, and incapable of definition, and as particoloured insignia of prejudice and violence. I cannot help seeing that “party is the madness of many for the gain of a few;” and when I reflect on the occurrences in my own times, and the lessons of history, I can discover little difference in the *measures* of the different parties, however various the men: the

engine continues the same, though the proprietors may occasionally vary. It is well remarked by Ralph, in his *History of Parliaments*, that “our contending political parties are the two thieves between whom the nation is crucified.” I am not, however, the apologist of that political pie-ball; the “genus incognitum” of naturalists, who, a single man with a double face, changes his opinions with the same facility he does his clothes—whose eyes are ever turned from the setting to the rising sun—and who, to worm himself into the favour of all parties, belongs to none, libels the one to the other, and agrees with the last he was in company with. No, Sir; rather than this non-descript, give me your apostate Lawyer, your “Renegado” and licensed manufacturer of Court-plaister, or even *Non mi ricordo* himself. It was a law of the Athenian Legislator, that the *neutral* citizen, when parties ran high in the republic, should suffer capital punishment; and I cannot but think it a more justifiable application of punishment, than ninety-nine of the hundred cases in the criminal code of England. There is no pretender to character and influence so purely contemptible; and I think you could guess, Sir, the name of a London *Alderman* of quicksilver notoriety, to whom I might apply the letter of Bishop Hall to Laud:—“Would I knew where to find you. To-day you are in the tents of the

Romanists, to-morrow in ours, and the next day between both. Our adversaries think you ours; we theirs: your conscience finds you with both, and neither.—How long will you halt in this indifferency? Resolve one way—and loathing this bat-like nature, be either a bird or a beast*.”

Sir, I despise these *party* distinctions; and when I read the classics of my native tongue—the works of the most brilliant fixed stars of the political system—those offerings placed on the altar of liberty—I see the glory divided amongst *all* parties. I see local and party prejudices, self-interest and passion, burst through by the human understanding, “like mists that melt before the morning’s sun!” I see MILTON, the staunch and radical Republican, delivering himself of that magnificent and sublime production, the

* In a volume of Trenchard’s posthumous essays is an admirable essay on “*practicable men*.” He says: “Most men are governed by ambition, vanity, avarice, or some other appetite; and therefore money, title, pleasure, and power, will render them practicable to the terms upon which they are to be had, let the terms be what they will. *No money, no Swiss*, but any Swiss for money. He must sign a blank to espouse no opinion; but be ready to entertain all, and to oppose all. He is to practise contradictions, and to find reasons for them, and against them, at the word of command: he must therefore defend or oppose the same thing, be it good or bad, if there be occasion, as there often is. Turnspits and mill-horses are very practicable creatures. By the same means that men become practicable to those whom they hate, *boroughs* become practicable to such as they never saw. The city banker had nothing to do, but to knock upon the bottom of his hog trough, (his pocket,) and presently a whole corporation grew *practicable* to the sound.”

“Speech for the Liberty of the Press”—JEREMY TAYLOR, the Tory dignitary of the Church, who followed the broken fortunes of an unfortunate Monarch, asserting the liberties of his countrymen in that almost inspired strain of poetry and patriotism the “Liberty of Prophesying”—a mine of moral and political truth, whence JOHN LOCKE, the constitutional Whig of his day, afterwards drew *his* immortal works on Government and Toleration. Ye narrow-minded bigots of prejudice and ignorance, be not the dupes and instruments of party with such mirrors before you!

And, oh! my countrymen, if there are any among you whose eyes should glance over these pages, unbelievers in Revelation, and yet friends of liberty—who, faithless to your own powers of mind, will not employ them in fairly weighing the evidences of Christianity—who know so little of its grand and magnificent scheme for human nature as to think that the Temple of Freedom is only to be built with the ruins of the Christian Church—pause a moment, and read the history of JESUS CHRIST. Read the history of the British Constitution—and the biographies of Sir Thomas More, of Hampden, of Sydney, of Locke, and Lord William Russel, who all of them bled and suffered in the cause of the People, and who braved the peril and the insult of sinking the foundation stones of the British Constitution, urged by the dictates of Christian

principles, and supported by their sublime and inspiring promises—

“ For Luther’s light has too much warn’d mankind,
For Hampden’s truths to linger long behind.”

Do not, Sir, suspect me to be the advocate or the cat’s paw of the episcopalian or the sectary. For my own part, Sir, I have rarely known polemical disputation produce conviction, scarcely one whose faith has become the trophy of doctrinal debate : I shall not cast my net in troubled waters, nor interfere in bold disputes, which seem neither leaving *secret things to the Lord our God*, nor *the revealed ones to us and our children*. “ Certainly,” says Bishop Fell, “ the first propagators of our faith proceeded at another rate ; they well knew, that not the *brain* but the *heart* was the proper soil of that celestial plant, and therefore did not amuse their proselytes with curious questions, but set them to the active part of their religion.” I have long since been wearied of the trackless desert of human opinions, and deplore that unaccountable folly of disputatious and worldly-minded Christians, who consider that disbelief of their appendages to the Gospel renders our credence of the essential parts of it totally useless. I think it fair to conclude, that the belief of no doctrine can be necessary to salvation which is not plainly declared so, and at the same time so fully explained and defined, that every one

who reads may understand. Surely doubtful meanings cannot be *revelation*. Few men read the Bible, whatever their speculative opinions may be, and yet remain ignorant of the essential doctrines of the Gospel. "I confess at first it puzzled much my inquiry to discover these mountains were made so near neighbours to the divided clouds." I heartily hope that the time is not far distant, when Christians will lay aside these human liveries, and once more be united under that universal and all comprehensive designation given to the *Christians* at Antioch. I wish that we could busy ourselves less with the failings of our neighbours, so as to gain more leisure for the detection of our own. "I pity such as love to live like pew-keepers in the house of God, busy in seating others, without ever providing a room for themselves*." To prevent the

* Jeremy Taylor, in the preface to the *Liberty of Prophesying*, most happily defines his object:—"The intendment of my discourse is, that permissions should be, in questions speculative, indeterminate, curious, and unnecessary; and that men would not make more necessities than God made, which indeed are not many. The fault I find and seek to remedy is, that men are so dogmaticall and resolute in their opinions, and impatient of others' disagreements, in those things wherein is no sufficient meanes of union and determination; but that men should let opinions and problemes keep their own forms, and not be obtruded as axiomes, nor questions in the vast collection of the systeme of divinity be adopted into the family of faith: and I think I have reason to desire this."

With the same elevation of understanding writes that quaint old author, Sir Thomas Brown, speaking of his early prejudices:—"These opinions I never maintained with pertinacity, or endeavoured to inveigle any man's belief unto mine; nor so much as ever revealed

possibility of mistake, I shall further quote the dedication of an eloquent and incomparable sermon by Cudworth*.

“ The scope of this is not to contend for this or that *opinion*, but onely to perswade men to the *Life of Christ*, as the pith and kernel of all religion. Without which, I may boldly say, all the severall *forms of religion* in the world, though we please ourselves never so much in them, are but so many severall *dreams*: and those many opinions about religion that are every where so eagerly contended for on all sides, where *this* does not lie at the bottome, are but so many *shadows* fighting with one another: wherefore I could not think any thing else, either more necessary for Christians in generall, or more seasonable at this time, then to stirre them up to the reall establishment of the righteousness of God in their hearts, and that participation of the Divine nature, which the apostle speaketh of. That so they might not content themselves with mere phancies and conceits of Christ, without the Spirit of Christ really dwelling in them, and Christ himself inwardly formed in their hearts: nor satisfie themselves with the mere holding of right and

or disputed them with my dearest friends; by which means I neither propagated them in others, nor confirmed them in myself; but suffering them to flame upon their own substance, without addition of new fuel, they went out insensibly of themselves.”—*Religio Medici*.

* Preached before the House of Commons, 1647, from 1 John, ii. 3, 4.—See CUDWORTH’S *Intellectual System*, vol. ii. 4to. edit.

orthodox opinions, as they conceive ; whilst they are utterly devoid within of that *divine life* which Christ came to kindle in men's souls ; and, therefore, are so apt to spend all their zeal upon a violent obtruding of their own opinions and apprehensions upon others, which cannot give entertainment to them ; which, besides its repugnancy to the doctrine and example of Christ himself, is like to be the bellows that will blow a perpetual fire of discord and contention in Christ's commonwealths : whilst in the mean time, these hungry and starved *opinions* devour all the life and substance of religion, as the lean kine, in Pharaoh's dream, did eat up the fat !”

Again, Sir, I call upon you, in the name of Christianity, to oppose with all your heart the MINISTRY of the present day : their DISMISSAL is the interest of *religion*, and the prayer of nine-tenths of the country : a Ministry—concocted of purblind Tories, apostate Whigs, and burnt out Jacobins ;—a mere knot of expedient-mongers, who have originated not one solitary instance of comprehensive policy ; whose impotency of judgment is only equalled by impotency of execution ; who contain neither the rank, the wealth, nor the talent of their country ; but who, with an unexampled and audacious defiance of public opinion, cleave to their places as “ dogs stick to a kitchen ;” and whose sole support is the countenance of rats, informers, and

alarmists. I have not disgraced any party by giving these men any canonical description, of Tory, Whig, or Radical; holding them to be a nauseous compound of the worst qualities of all.

If such a Ministry can maintain itself, it can only be by "curbing the Seditious Press;" and the necessity of this has accordingly been long the burden of their song, supported by a chorus of hole and corner addressers.

I trust, Sir, that if any invasion of the FREEDOM of the PRESS is attempted, either in this or any succeeding Session, you will stand forward, and place the protecting shield of your eloquence and exertion over this telegraph of knowledge—this invincible missionary of Christianity—this conservator of the liberties of Christendom! Address to our "Representatives" the nervous language of our immortal poet:—"What should ye do then? should ye suppress all this flowry crop of knowledge and new light sprung up, and yet springing daily in the city? Should ye set an *oligarchy* of twenty ingrossers over it, to bring a famine upon our minds again, when ye shall know nothing but what is measured to us by their bushel? Believe it, Lords and Commons, they who counsel ye to such a suppressing, do as good as bid ye suppress yourselves."

Here, Sir, I must take my leave: you have been described by a late celebrated female historian, the most popular man in England. I have pointed out

to you the only mode in which you can maintain that character: I have concluded an exposé of "Sedition and Blasphemy:" I have, I trust, in some degree at least, vindicated the *People*. But had blasphemy and sedition really existed among them, I should have counselled you to be yet more jealous of the FREEDOM of the PRESS. I should have called to your mind the character given of Mr. Fox, by the same female eulogist; of that true constancy of integrity and intellect, which "maintained principles in spite of circumstances, and knew how to preserve the household gods of the friends of freedom in the midst of the conflagration!"

I have now, Sir, accomplished a solemn duty. I have written with the intent, and, I trust, in the spirit of Christianity. I would not wish a name to add to or detract from the authority of these Letters: follow the light they yield, without heeding the hand that holds it. That they may accomplish the intention of their author, is his most ardent hope—and hasten that promised time, when "*HE shall judge among the nations; and shall WORK CONVICTION in many peoples**."

I am, Sir,

With the highest respect,

Your obedient Servant and Fellow-Christian,

CHRISTOPHILUS.

* Bishop Lowth's Translation of Isaiah, ii. 4.

APPENDIX.

“It is the greatest impiety to deprive mankind of liberty in matters of religion, or to hinder them from chusing what Divinity they may chuse to worship; neither man, or God, is desirous of forced service.”—TERTULLIAN’S *Apologet.* chap. 14.

“If we were to use violence in defending the faith, the Bishops would oppose it.”—ST. HILARY, b. 1.

“Religion by compulsion is no longer religion; it must be by persuasion, and not by constraint. Religion is under no controul, and cannot by power be directed.”—LACTANTIUS, b. 3.

“It is a most execrable heresy and crime, to want to drag by force, by blows, by imprisonment, &c. those whom we have not been able to convince by reason.”—ST. ATHANASIUS, b. 1.

“Nothing is more contrary to religion than constraint.”—JUSTIN MARTYR, b. 5.

“Shall we persecute those whom God suffers and tolerates?”—ST. AUGUSTINE.

“Use not the least violence against the Jews.”—*Fourth Council of Toledo, 56th Canon.*

“Advise, but force not.”—*Letters of ST. BERNARD.*

“We do not pretend to destroy error by force and violence.”—*Discourse of the Clergy of France to Louis the Thirteenth.*

“We have always disapproved of rigorous measures.”—*Assembly of the Clergy, August 11, 1560.*

“Of the same consideration is mending of authors, not to their own mind but ours, that is, to mend them so as to spoil them; forbidding the publication of books, in which there is nothing impious, or against the public interest, leaving out clauses in translations, disgracing men’s persons, charging disavowed doctrines upon men, and the persons of the men with the consequents of their doctrine, which they deny either to be true or to be consequent, false reporting of disputations and conferences, burning books by the hand of the hangman, and all such acts, which shew that we either distrust God for the maintenance of his truth, or that we distrust the cause, or distrust ourselves and our abilities.”—*Liberty of Prophesying*, Preface, p. 35.

“If you have been so beloved of Heaven, as to be shown the truth, it has done you a most special favour; but does it become those who have the inheritance of their father, to hate those who are not so blessed?”—*Spirit of Laws*, b. 25.

“It is with religion as it is with love; commands are nothing, constraint still less; nothing is more independent than love and belief.”—AMELOT *de la Houssaite*, on the *Letters of Cardinal d’Ossat*.

“It is a most barbarous zeal to pretend to plant religion in the heart, as if persuasion could be the effect of constraint.”—BOULAINVILLIER’S *State of France*.

“Experience teaches us, that violence is more likely to irritate than to heal those evils which have taken root in the mind,” &c.—DE THOU, *Epist. dedicated to Henry IV.*

“Violence always makes hypocrites; you cannot

persuade, when you proclaim on all sides nothing but menaces.”—TILLEMONT’S *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 6.

“ It appears to be conformable to justice, truth, and right reason, to walk in the track of the ancient church, which never made use of violence to extend and establish its religion.”—*Remonstrance of the Parliament of Paris to Henry II.*

“ The exacting by force to any religion, is an evident proof, that the spirit which directs it is a spirit inimical to truth.”—DIROIS, *Doctor of the Sorbonne*, b. vi. c. 4.

“ We know that faith comes by persuasion, and is not to be controuled.”—FLECHIER, *Bishop of Nismes*, lett. 19.

“ Remember that the disorders of the soul are not to be cured by force and violence.”—*Cardinal de CAMUS, Pastoral Instruct.* 1088.

“ No; they must be met by a reason, instructed in the knowledge of things, and fought in their own quarters, and their arms must be turned upon themselves; this may be done, and the advantage is all ours. We have steel and brass for our defence, and they have little else than twigs and bull-rushes for the assault; we have light, and firm ground, and they are lost in smoke and mists; they tread upon bogs and dangerous fens, and reel near the rocks and steeps. And shall we despise our advantages, and forsake them? Shall we relinquish our ground, and our light, and muffle ourselves up in darkness? Shall we give our enemies the weapons, and all the odds, and so endeavour to insure their triumph over us? This is sottishly to betray religion and ourselves.”—*Essays by GLANVILLE, Chaplain of King Charles II., on Usefulness of Real Philosophy to Religion*, p. 42.

“ It truly ought, provided it does not trouble the peace and order of the state ; for it does not depend on man to believe, or not to believe ; but it depends on him to treat with respect the usages and customs of this country : and if you say it is a crime not to believe the established religion, you yourselves accuse the first Christians, your fathers, and you would justify those whom you accuse of crime, in having delivered them to the executioners.”—LOCKE *on Toleration*.

“ To put men in prison merely on account of their religious belief or persuasion, is a great oppression, and, properly speaking, *false imprisonment* : to fine them, or take away their estates for that cause, is *robbery* : to put them to death for not acting against their consciences, is *murder*. Can any thing be more wicked ? It is not, then, difficult to determine whether the folly and absurdity, or tyranny and wickedness, of persecution on account of religion, are greater.”—GROTIUS, *Epistolarum Amicorum*.

“ If some men think others are mistaken or erroneous in matters of religion, it is a kind and charitable part, to endeavour, by counsel, argument, and persuasion, to set them right ; but all attempts to force them are *absurd*, because *impossible*—*tyrannical*, because *unjust*.”—TOPLADY.

“ Now are we to think, that these gentle means of propagating Christianity were proper only for the time of its first appearance, when the church was destitute of the civil power ; and, by reason of its opposition to the prevailing religions of the world, drew upon itself the anger and fury of the princes of it ; but that the case is now altered, since the kings and rulers, upon their conversion to the faith, are obliged to subject

their sceptres to Jesus Christ: for the change of fortune makes no change in his religion; nor can the alteration of any worldly affairs take away the force and obligations of his commands; for Christ, by his apostles, preached one scheme of doctrines to last for ever. 'Tis true, that kings are to submit their sceptres to Christ, not by forcing men with punishments, in opposition to his commands, to profess, contrary to their conscience and real sentiments, what they believe to be false, and so to fill his church with hypocrites instead of true believers; but by ordaining equal and just laws, agreeable to the Gospel precepts, for the preservation of the publick tranquillity; and that there may be nothing to obstruct the true spiritual worship of God, and the salvation of souls. This is that most harmless, and yet most powerful, method of propagating the Gospel, agreeable to its nature and genius, by which, in the beginning, it was spread in a short time through the whole world, by a few weak and defenceless persons, instructed only by the Divine Spirit; through the weight of its arguments, and the power of its miracles; and by which it may be still propagated and preserved pure and uncorrupt, against all the attempts of unbelievers and hereticks. For our Lord did not furnish his disciples with carnal weapons to oppose the frauds, impostures, violence, and persecutions of the world; but with spiritual weapons, which, through God, are powerful to bring every imagination into captivity to the obedience of Christ, that they might triumph over the world in the midst of afflictions, by their innocence, simplicity, fortitude, and patience. So far, indeed, was he from ordaining persecutions as the punishment of error, that he commands his church,

when suffering persecutions, to pray for those that persecute it. By this means the church in the beginning was founded, and so wonderfully propagated throughout the whole world in its first and purest ages.”—LIMBORCH’S *History of the Inquisition*, vol. i. p. 3.

Lord Kames gives the following parable against persecution, for which he acknowledges his obligations to the ingenious Dr. Franklin :—“ And it came to pass after these things, that Abraham sat in the door of his tent, about the going down of the sun. And behold a man bent with age, coming from the way of the wilderness, leaning on a staff. And Abraham arose and met him, and said unto him, Turn in, I pray thee, and wash thy feet, and tarry all night ; and thou shalt rise early in the morning, and go on thy way. And the man said, Nay ; for I will abide under this tree. But Abraham pressed him greatly : so he turned and went into the tent : and Abraham baked unleavened bread, and they did eat. And when Abraham saw that the man blessed not God, he said unto him, Wherefore dost thou not worship the most high God, Creator of heaven and earth ? And the man answered and said, I do not worship thy God, neither do I call upon his name ; for I have made to myself a god, which abideth always in mine house, and provideth me with all things. And Abraham’s zeal was kindled against the man ; and he arose and fell upon the man, and drove him forth with blows into the wilderness. And God called unto Abraham, saying, Abraham, where is the stranger ? And Abraham answered, and said, Lord, he would not worship thee, neither would he call upon thy name ; therefore have I driven him out from before my face into the wilderness.

And God said, Have I borne with him these hundred and ninety and eight years, and nourished him, and clothed him, notwithstanding his rebellion against me; and couldst not thou, who art thyself a sinner, bear with him one night?"—*Sketches of the History of Man*, vol. iii. 435.

The following extracts are made from an old tract in my possession, of sterling merit, but of the author of which I know nothing, except from the title-page. The reader will not, however, I am sure, regret the time bestowed on such sound and unanswerable argument. The tract is entitled, "Liberty of Conscience the Magistrate's Interest; by a Protestant, a Lover of Peace and the Prosperity of the Nation—1668:"—

"For the errors you may suppose men possessed withal, as an eager persecution is apt to make the professors of them think them more than ordinary truths, and themselves some great men in maintaining them; so it makes others seek after that, when driven into a corner, which, were it in the open streets, no man would regard. He that preaches and writes under restraint, that restraint begets him readers and hearers, that would else pass through the world with very little notice taken of him; things difficult, and hard to be come by, carry some weight in men's expectancy: foolish and absurd opinions are only put to nurse by persecution, and by that made to have something in the concerns and fears of others, which has indeed nothing in itself. The hiding men by a keen pursuit after them, in the profession of such things, keeps them alive; whereas if they were openly preached, written, and discoursed of, the folly of them would appear such, as not only others, but the men themselves, would be

ashamed and aweary of them. Besides, punishing men for religion, where there are several parties, laies a foundation of endless troubles and perpetual feuds ; for that ill opinion and anger, which makes one party, when prevailing, to suppress and punish the rest, propagates still the same anger and dislike in the parties punished, and begets, by such provocation, a certain resolution to retort the same again, and a readiness to embrace all opportunities to effect it ; whereas that party that once gives liberty to the rest, buries all those evils, and unites all in the common union of their own interest and security. 'Twill be impossible to find out a way for men of differing judgments in religion to live together, and enjoy the common advantages which, as men, they may afford one to another, unless they exercise an indulgence to each other, in that variety they stand in as Christians. Where there are many differences, and a state denies any liberty, but strictly imposeth the state religion upon all, the case always falls out to be, that the earnest desire of what we call *liberty of conscience*, lies glowing in the embers of men's discontent, and is a thing in itself so popular, a thing of so great evidence of reason, when it may be discoursed upon equal terms, and so much the concern of every man but the présent imposer, that 'tis very apt to kindle and flame out, and, upon any strait or emergency of the state, either by forreign war or domestic division, to make such an earthquake, as may endanger the whole ; 'tis most prudent in a state to give liberty, where there is least power to demand it ; those may be gained by giving it, that may prove dangerous in forcing it. To force and pen men up in such things is wholly unnatural, and will, like wind

penn'd up in the earth, or the sea shut up by banks, break out at one time or another with the greater violence. Liberty in religion was never yet denied in a protestant state, but it had, first or last, a mischievous effect; to instruct men in protestant principles, and then put a yoke of uniformity upon them, has no more proportion in it, than to educate a man at *Geneva* that is to live at *Rome*, and to breed him a *Calvinist* whom you intend for a *Papist*.

“ Lastly, liberty of conscience is the best way to secure us to the protestant faith, and to prevent a relapse to popery; the protestant religion will be fastest rooted, by exerting fully the principles of it, and a throughout adhering to them; by our practice in dealing one with another, to deny those principles by which we justify our separation from *Rome*, is the ready way to make them return thither again. *Teach men, that there is no man, nor men, under any one denomination since the apostles' times, that are infallible in delivering divine truth. Teach men, that the Scripture is the only rule of religion, and let them read it: Tell them, they are to follow no men farther than they follow that rule, and that every man is judge according to the best light he hath of that rule, and how far other men comply with it, and differ from it; and that every man is bound to behave himself towards God, according to the judgment he shall so make within himself; all which are protestant principles, and eternal truths. And then collect the sense which those principles issue themselves into; and how unreasonable will it then appear, to force men to comply with the belief of others contrary to their own, and, when you have bid them use their light and reason, to punish them, because they will not*

oppose it, and go against it! How can we otherwise justify forcing men, where such principles are avowed, but by a flat denial of them, and recurring to those popish weapons of the absolute power of the church, and her uncontrollable authority; and so, by condemning others that, upon the exercise of their own light and reason, now differ from us, condemn ourselves, who upon the same at first departed from Rome? When we oppose the Church of Rome, we justify ourselves upon the very same arguments by which dissenters now amongst ourselves make their defence against us; and when we dispute against them, we take up the same arguments the papists use against us. There is scarce any considerable argument urged of late for conformity and imposition, but, if you trace it to the seat, you shall find it in Bellarmine or Suarez. The truth is: he that cannot endure to have any differ from him in opinion about the supernatural truth of the Gospel, and will have no toleration of several persuasions of that kind, and thinks it destructive to mankind and the being of every state to suffer any so to be; that man is a protestant by mistake, and will find himself at home in his principles no where but at Rome. The farther we remove in our reformation from the practices and principles of the Church of Rome, and live upon our own, the less like we are to return to it. If we make use of their arguments and principles at one time, we may come to use them at another, and at last espouse them altogether; and what serves our turns at some times to oppose others, may at last prevail upon ourselves. And so 'tis in our practices, reserving any of their ceremonies may at last bring us to some of their doctrines. He that keeps

a holiday, is within a step of praying to that saint for whose sake he keeps it, especially if he have the wit to consider why he keeps it. He that kneels, and puts weight upon it, is in a fair way to adoration; and he that is for joyning the Cross with baptism, may come to do it after grace, and cross himself in time. 'Twas Bishop Bonner's observation, when he saw the Reformation, and how many of the popish ceremonies were retained, being asked what he thought of it, *If they like (saith he) the tast of our broth so well, they will eat of our beef shortly.*"

" 'Tis imposition in religion sweeps the house, and keeps the nest warm for popery: liberty of conscience mortally stabs it; where that is once given, it may be said to the pope, as it was to *Belshazzar*, *God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it, and the place where he once tyrannized, shall know him there no more.*

" There is no bond of union amongst disagreeing persons, like persecution; the common concern of their security then begets correspondency, acquaintance, and such intercourse and mutual assistance as endears them above any thing one to another: and for the danger there may be of any party, there is nothing sure so like to remove that as indulging them with a liberty: the best way to be secured against the discontent of any party is to remove the cause of such discontent; and the best way to be out of fear of them, unless you can totally destroy them, is to oblige them; and so at once to engage and win them over, and thereby disband our own fears.

" To say, that upon a prudential account, liberty should never be allowed in state, because 'tis that which will unite parties, and bring them to a consistency

amongst themselves, and so render them much more dangerous, is to say a thing upon a great mistake. For common experience shows us, that nothing unites parties more amongst themselves than a hot persecution; nor does any thing bring them so much together as that; 'tis like a great storm that drives cattle that are scattered about altogether, and brings them to meet in one common shelter to save themselves.

“ Methinks the author should have remembered, that that advice would have kept Christianity out of the world: for if we follow the track of such policy, we shall find that what we now say against tolerating dissenters amongst ourselves, the papists first said, and do still say against us all; and if we go one step higher, the heathens said the very same against the Christian religion itself, and thought it a factious, fanatic project of sick-brained men, and a thing not to be endured, that men should not content themselves with the same gods that the rest of the world worshipped and acquiesced in. 'Tis a sad thing, and much to be lamented, that the protestants should take up the dregs of those politics, and make use of them one against another upon every small difference amongst themselves.

“ He that would have the magistrate force all men to his religion, will himself be burnt by his own principles when he comes into a countrey where the state religion differs from him: to say he is in the right, and the state that does it in the wrong, is a miserable begging the question. If one magistrate be to do it, all are to do it; and there can be no other rule of truth and error in that case but what they think so. If a magistrate be once admitted to punish with death what is really and truly in itself an heresie, he may and must, by

the same rule, so punish every thing he thinks so. Where shall the definition of heresie terminate, and who shall set the magistrate bounds in such a case? Misinformation, passion, or some sinister interest, can only lead men into such principles, which tend to nothing but to make religion disturb the peace and quiet of all mankind ; and, as one saith well, *to bring Christians to a butchery one of another, and to make a mere shambles of Christendom.*"

The concluding quotations are made from that standard work, "The Apology for the Freedom of the Press, and for General Liberty, by the Rev. Robert Hall;" third edition, 1794. Their direct application to the present times requires no comment.

"The most capital advantage an enlightened people can enjoy is the liberty of discussing every subject which can fall within the compass of the human mind : while this remains, freedom will flourish ; but should it be lost or impaired, its principles will neither be well understood or long retained. To render the magistrate a judge of truth, and engage his authority in the suppression of opinions, shows an inattention to the nature and design of political society. When a nation forms a government, it is not wisdom but *power* which they place in the hands of the magistrate ; from whence it follows, his concern is only with those objects which *power* can operate upon. On this account the administration of justice, the protection of property, and the defence of every member of the community from violence and outrage, fall naturally within the province of the civil ruler, for these may all be accomplished by *power* ; but an attempt to distinguish truth from error,

and to countenance one set of opinions to the prejudice of another, is to apply power in a manner mischievous and absurd. To comprehend the reasons on which the right of public discussion is founded, it is requisite to remark the difference between *sentiment* and *conduct*. The *behaviour* of men in society will be influenced by motives drawn from the prospect of good and evil : here then is the proper department of government, as it is capable of applying that good and evil by which actions are determined. Truth, on the contrary, is quite of a different nature, being supported only by *evidence* ; and as when this is presented we cannot withhold our assent, so where this is wanting, no power or authority can command it.

“ However some may affect to dread controversy, it can never be of ultimate disadvantage to the interests of truth, or the happiness of mankind. Where it is indulged in its full extent, a multitude of ridiculous opinions will, no doubt, be obtruded upon the public ; but any ill influence they may produce cannot continue long, as they are sure to be opposed with at least equal ability, and that superior advantage which is ever attendant on truth. The colours with which wit or eloquence may have adorned a false system will gradually die away, sophistry be detected, and every thing estimated, at length, according to its true value. Publications, besides, like every thing else that is human, are of a mixed nature, where truth is often blended with falsehood, and important hints suggested in the midst of such impertinent or pernicious matter ; nor is there any way of separating the precious from the vile, but tolerating the whole. Where the right of unlimited enquiry is exerted, the human faculties will be upon the advance ;

where it is relinquished, they will be of necessity at a stand, and will probably decline."

"And had this principle of free enquiry been permitted in succeeding times to have full scope, Christianity would at this period have been much better understood, and the animosity of sects considerably abated. Religious toleration has never been complete even in England; but having prevailed more here than, perhaps, in any other country, there is no place where the doctrines of religion have been set in so clear a light, or its truth so ably defended. The writings of Deists have contributed much to this end. Whoever will compare the late defences of Christianity by Locke, Butler, or Clarke, with those of the ancient apologists, will discern in the former far more precision, and an abler method of reasoning, than in the latter; which must be attributed chiefly to the superior spirit of inquiry by which modern times are distinguished. Whatever alarm then may have been taken at the liberty of discussion, religion, it is plain, hath been a gainer by it; its abuses corrected, and its Divine authority settled on a firmer basis than ever."

THE END.

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